

# The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network

The Barcelona Declaration (BD) signed by the European Union (EU) member states and 12 non-EU Mediterranean countries in November 1995 forms the basis for a partnership of increased cooperation, exchange and coordination among these countries. An important aspect of the Declaration is the commitment to respect and promote human rights in the signatory countries.

The creation in 1997 of the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (EMHRN), a network of over 50 EU and non-EU Mediterranean human rights non-governmental organisations (NGOs), reflects the efforts of civil society to contribute to this process as *per* the Declaration. The rationale of the EMHRN's work is that the Barcelona Process provides an effective way of addressing the improvement of human rights in the Euro-Mediterranean region. Its main objectives are to:

- Support and publicise the universal principles of human rights.
- Strengthen, assist and coordinate the efforts of its members to monitor compliance by the Partner States with the principles of the Barcelona Declaration in the field of human rights and humanitarian concerns.
- Support the development of democratic institutions, the promotion of the rule of law, human rights and human rights education.

## Evaluation question and methodology

The evaluation has assessed the direct and indirect relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of the on-going programme of the EMHRN. To answer the evaluation questions the Team:

- reviewed publications and documents reflecting internal and external communications of the Network and its members;
- met with and interviewed members of the RELEX staff of the European Commission; staff of the European Parliament; staff of EuropeAid; representatives of other Europe-based non-governmental organisations; and staff of the EMHRN and of the Danish Institute for Human Rights;
- attended the Sixth General Assembly meeting of the Network on 5-7 December 2003 in Malta and meetings of the Justice, Human Rights Education and Palestine Working Groups.

**This evaluation was carried out by Aaron Rhodes and Rima Habasch and finished January 2004**

## Information, documentation and dissemination

This constitutes the first priority field identified by the EMHRN: to raise awareness of the human rights dimension of the Barcelona process among members and the public at large, and to inform the EMP mechanisms and the public about the human rights situation in the region as well as about the work of human rights organisations.

Since the start of the programme, information flow has grown, as reflected in the increased volume of EMHRN publications and statements. The EMHRN has reached a considerable number of stakeholders through its mailing list, website, letters of appeal and publications. Information collected by the EMHRN from a broad range of civil society institutions, governmental bodies and the media has been found credible and reliable. The EMHRN has succeeded in raising awareness among several different constituencies of the obligations of partner governments to uphold their commitments to international human rights standards with the ultimate objective of improving compliance. The success of this central priority area of the EMHRN has contributed to the development of a human rights community.

The dissemination of information, however, can be greatly enhanced by the development of a system, which would allow the use of the disseminated information by the main stakeholders to be assessed. The objective of reaching the public at large has not been achieved. The development of a media strategy taking into account the various groups of stakeholders the EMHRN intends to reach would enhance the effectiveness of this strategy.

## Dialogue, lobbying and campaigning

Through this priority field the EMHRN aims to strengthen the human rights mechanism in the Barcelona Process. The EMHRN has made major progress in its advocacy with EU governments, the EMP structure, EU delegations, and with members of the European Parliament as well as with the European Commission and the European Council. The EMHRN office in Brussels has played an important role in that it constitutes an effective platform for lobbying.

*This summary is from an evaluation commissioned by the European Commission on projects financed in the field of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) with the aim to promote and support human rights and democracy in third countries.*

*Information on activities and actions can be found on the EIDHR website:*

*[http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/eidhr/index\\_en.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/europeaid/projects/eidhr/index_en.htm)*

*The views expressed in this summary do not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Commission.*

The EMHRN has been less successful in contributing to dialogue with governments, especially in Southern Mediterranean countries, which is largely due to the political climate in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean regions, but also results from the limited capacity of EMHRN members, some of which can be influenced positively by Network initiatives. Positive influence is reflected in several cases where dialogue with governments was achieved with the help of the EMHRN. This is particularly true for countries where conditions for human rights organisations remain difficult.

The EMHRN has also assisted its members by reacting rapidly to help call international attention to detained human rights activists in a number of urgent appeals.

The development and implementation of country strategies, together with the EMHRN members, would improve the potential of the EMHRN to contribute to a civil society-government dialogue and needed changes. This would involve a re-examination and a refining of advocacy objectives and approach.

## Capacity building

The EMHRN has defined capacity building of its members as one of the three priority fields to achieve its objectives. Capacity building, according to the EMHRN, consists mainly of providing networking opportunities for its members, the development of joint projects, training, communication and the exchange of expertise, especially through working groups.

The EMHRN Secretariat has played an important role in building the capacity of its members. It has been successful in promoting communication and exchanges between human rights organisations, which has led to increased networking and cross-country cooperation in the region; it has facilitated capacity building through human rights education initiatives especially via the working groups and organising associated meetings, including for example a Summer School; and it has provided training seminars on specialised topics. One example is the highly successful training seminar on the Barcelona Process.

Capacity-related activities, however, appear to be of an ad hoc nature, lacking a systematic approach, strategic priorities and conceptual foundation. They seem to follow what the members have demanded. The development of a strategy would remedy this situation. The provision of capacity building would benefit from a long-term strategy on the basis of which activities can be developed. Only then would it be possible to tailor capacity building to concrete needs.

The EMHRN could then improve its role as a capacity builder by tailoring training and taking into account the role human rights organisations have in their respective countries and their organisational make-up.

The working group structure has much potential in the EMHRN in terms of capacity building and channelling the expertise of members on behalf of the programme of the Secretariat and of the Network as a whole. Capacity building should, in addition to the provision of human rights education, also include the promotion of organisational capacity of member organisations.

## Management and institutional issues

The EMHRN is a self-governing association of independent human rights organisations, each of which has its own programme and governance structure. The core body in the EMHRN is the General Assembly, that is, the inclusive body of members, which has the obligation to ensure that the EMHRN's activities conform to its objectives as per the Statutes.

On an organisational level the EMHRN has made substantial improvements by developing an internal governance and management structure, consisting of Officers, an Executive Committee and a Secretariat. The EMHRN has developed statutes, a human resources policy and has a solid financial management system.

It could make substantial progress in scaling up its activities. In particular, the opening of an office in Brussels has strengthened the EMHRN's capacity for lobbying and campaigning.

The programme is well-managed, meetings are well-planned and internal reporting is extensive and thorough. Employed staff have the necessary profile to do their job and are highly professional and committed. This is reflected in the substantial overtime invested by staff in implementing the programme. Additional funds should be made available for the recruitment of staff for both the current programme and the expansion of activities.

Current programme activities are formulated in an action plan, which is translated into a work plan. At the General Assembly meeting an Annual Report is presented, which outlines whether objectives have been achieved. While this procedure suggests transparency and accountability the EMHRN would improve the management of its current and future programme by applying project cycle management tools, such as a logical framework indicating programme objectives and expected results and a system of monitoring and evaluation.

As a loose organisation of independent organisations the EMHRN has provided its members with a platform to interact, exchange expertise and develop joint initiatives. The EMHRN would improve its coherence as an organisation by strengthening its internal communication system with its members. This would also include a more systematised flow of information from its members and ensure efficient member contribution. Similarly, it is recommended that external communications be improved through the development of a media strategy.

## Impact, conclusions and recommendations

Funds provided by the EC have been directed at developing an organisation and a process for regional and inter-regional cooperation and dialogue.

The EMHRN has proved to be an invaluable and indispensable NGO partner to the work of EU members, EC officials and EMP institutions. It has contributed to a better understanding of the Barcelona Process, has lobbied effectively and has brought its members closer to EMP institutions. The activities of the EMHRN have had impact on civil society, both in the Mediterranean countries and in the EU. They have had impact on national policies and they

The evaluations are carried out in partnership with the Netherlands Humanist Committee on Human Rights and The Danish Institute for Human Rights.

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have had some impact on the evolution of the EMP and on the fulfilment of the objectives of the Barcelona Process itself.

The EMHRN contributed directly to the capacity of NGOs to work with their constituencies by providing training and assistance in fundraising and development and added the value of the political weight which membership of the EMHRN provides for its members. Its added value for members also lies in the credibility and the protection it gives them. As a result of this, applications for membership have increased, as has the scope of activities of the members. Membership of the EMHRN has generated more horizontal cooperation among members and exchange of expertise

A general weakness of the EMHRN is the lack of a clear strategy, focus and direction in its work. The EMHRN needs to re-assess its programme and develop a long-term strategy. This in turn would constitute the basis for developing a programme using project cycle management tools.

The EMHRN would improve its current programme by identifying priorities within its three objectives: information; dialogue, lobbying and campaigning; and capacity building. In order to improve the dissemination of information the EMHRN should develop a media strategy which would be tailored to the different constituencies it aims to reach. Dialogue with governments will benefit from a more structured and systematic approach. Finally, the EMHRN needs to devote special effort to building capacity among its members. The development of a strategy of capacity building would address issues related to the organisational make-up of its members as well as their role as human rights organisations in the region.

The Team believes that, when assessed in terms of its unique position and future potential, the EMHRN can be considered to hold a 'monopoly' in its field and thus qualify to implement a Targeted Project. Such a project could focus on strengthening the capacity of members and continuing to monitor and promote compliance with the Barcelona Declaration, and might further engage other international human rights mechanisms.