The Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean and Its Contribution to Democracy Promotion and Crisis Management

Abstract

One of the main functions of international parliamentary institutions (IPIs) consists of conducting parallel diplomatic relations, known as parliamentary diplomacy, especially in the fields of peace-building, crisis management and democracy promotion. The effectiveness of this form of parliamentarisation of international relations is often called into question, and can only be judged through systematic empirical work. This article aims at contributing to this debate by exploring the parliamentary diplomacy activities performed by one of the most prominent parliamentary actors in Euro-Mediterranean relations, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM). What kinds of tools has the PAM adopted to implement its parliamentary diplomacy function? What is the impact of PAM’s parliamentary diplomacy? The article considers the following elements: legal and policy instruments, institutional features, functions performed while in session, activities directly addressing the national level, and parliamentary diplomacy as such. The period encompassed by the analysis ranges from 2006 to 2015.

Keywords

PAM (Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean), parliamentary diplomacy, crisis management, democracy promotion

Introduction

It is widely recognised that the Mediterranean is one of the world’s least structured regions in terms of intergovernmental regional cooperation. Indeed, despite the growing number of initiatives launched since the mid-1970s by external political actors, such as the EU, UN, OSCE, NATO, Council of Europe and US, with a view to promoting economic, political and scientific cooperation, the level of intra-regional institution building has remained rather low. One of the most ambitious projects in this area, namely the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (since 2008: Union for the Mediterranean), is generally regarded in the literature as falling short of fulfilling its main objectives as originally set out in 1995 in Barcelona. Aliboni identifies four main factors accounting for this low level of institutional development. First of all, as already mentioned, the main political (and cultural) initiatives in the Mediterranean are taken by external actors: as a consequence, the Mediterranean basin remains a “border” and not a “centre” in itself. Secondly, the


2 According to Sabic and Bojinovic, political actors/institutions are “external” to the Mediterranean if, though devoting a substantial part of their activities to the Mediterranean, their headquarters is not located in the Mediterranean and their membership is not composed exclusively by Mediterranean actors. In their study, which is one of the most comprehensive ones on this issue, the authors map more than 40 initiatives launched in the region by these actors between 1970 and 2006. See Sabic and Bojinovic, ‘Mapping a Regional Institutional Architecture’, pp. 322-323.


Mediterranean countries do not constitute a “security complex”\(^5\); they have different security agendas, since the factors that affect South-South security have little to do with those affecting North-South security. Finally, great economic gaps exist between countries in the north and the south of the basin due to very different political and institutional regimes.

However, in contrast to this weak intra-regional intergovernmental institutional framework, non-governmental and less traditional forms of cooperation and diplomacy seem to be developing at a more robust pace. Already in 2007, Sabic and Bojinovic identified a particularly dynamic growth of Mediterranean cooperation initiatives carried out by non-governmental organisations and networks, local authorities, research institutes and think tanks.\(^6\) What is missing in this list is a clear reference to the role played by parliamentary actors. Especially since the end of the Cold War, the role of parliamentary institutions in international relations has grown to such an extent that some scholars now talk about a “parliamentarisation of regionalisation and globalisation”\(^7\). In particular, Malamud and Stavridis claim that parliamentary institutions generally engage in international affairs in three major ways: 1) by strengthening their oversight capacity vis-à-vis national governments’ foreign policy; 2) by conducting parallel diplomatic relations, known as parliamentary diplomacy, at the bilateral and multilateral levels; and 3) by establishing and empowering parliaments as representative bodies of international or regional organisations\(^8\).

In the Mediterranean, too, a “complex, multi-level and multi-actor parliamentary scene”\(^9\) has developed, consisting of a nested web of interactions among sub-state parliamentary actors, national parliaments and international parliamentary institutions. But unlike the intergovernmental track, in the parliamentary sphere a truly intra-regional pan-Mediterranean institution has actually emerged — the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM), established in 2005.

Nevertheless, the literature has devoted little attention to this institution, while mainly focusing on the parliamentary dimension of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. As a consequence, this article aims to fill this gap and assess the role played by the PAM in the fields of democracy promotion and crisis management, which represent the bulk of its mandate. Drawing on the growing academic literature on international parliamentary institutions\(^11\), PAM’s diplomatic activities will be explored in order to identify

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5 A security complex is defined as “a set of states whose major security perceptions and concerns are so interlinked that their national security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another”. See Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, Security: A New Framework for Analysis (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), p. 12. The idea of regional security complexes was originally developed by Buzan, lately worked on by Wæver, and is now part of the Copenhagen School’s collective theoretical approach to security. The theory aims at providing a conceptual framework that captures the emergent new structure of international security, drawing on the assumptions that in the post-Cold War international relations take on a more regionalised character, and that insecurity is often associated with proximity, since most political and military threats travel more easily over short distances than over long ones. In addition to the abovementioned work, see also: Barry Buzan, ‘New Patterns of Global Security in the Twenty-First Century’, International Affairs, vol. 67, no. 3, 1991, pp. 431-451; Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, Regions and Powers. The Structure of International Security (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).


7 Nonetheless, the origins of international parliamentary institutions can be dated back to the establishment of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 1889, with a wish to create a permanent institutional structure for the peaceful settlement of international disputes.


the kind of tools adopted by the Assembly to implement its mandate and evaluate their real or potential impact.

Accordingly, the article is structured as follows. The first section places PAM in its historical context and offers an overview of its composition, mandate and internal institutional structure. The second and third sections deal with PAM’s parliamentary diplomacy activities in the fields of democracy promotion and crisis management. Even though these two dimensions are often interconnected in operational terms, for the sake of clarity, they are treated here as analytically distinguished. The concluding section summarises the main findings and identifies the major challenges that constrain the efficacy of PAM’s activities. The timespan of the analysis ranges from PAM’s first session in 2006 to 2015.

Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean: Historical Overview, Composition, Mandate and Institutional Structure

PAM is the only Mediterranean institution where full membership is open exclusively to littoral countries. Currently, it is composed of 27 full member states and 12 international (and/or regional) organisations and institutions with observer status.

Its establishment is the result of the institutionalisation process of the Inter-parliamentary Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM), set up by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in 1992. Indeed, having already held seven Inter-Parliamentary Conferences on Security and Cooperation in Europe between 1973 and 1991, the IPU decided to establish a similar process for the Mediterranean, in order to respond to the main challenges existing in the region. Thus, in 1992 the IPU parliamentarians from the Mediterranean region met in Malaga to set up an inter-parliamentary CSCM. Over its thirteen-year history, the CSCM has held three more inter-parliamentary conferences: in Valetta (Malta, 1995), Marseilles (France, 2000) and Nafplio (Greece, 2005). The members of the CSCM also met twice a year at IPU Assemblies, to ensure regular dialogue on the most relevant issues for the region.

At its fourth and final Conference, the participating parliamentarians agreed to transform the CSCM process into a permanent Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. The objective was threefold: to give more stature to parliamentary diplomacy in the Mediterranean; to provide the region with a unique parliamentary forum of its own, unattached to any intergovernmental process, where members can draw up their own agenda; and to enhance the widest possible participation of Mediterranean states in the Parliamentary Assembly with equal voting rights, enabling them to proceed to the drawing up of recommendations and opinions on questions of common concern to the Mediterranean. In particular, to use the words of MP Iturrioz, the desire on the part of parliamentarians to establish an ad hoc body for the Mediterranean reflected “their confidence in the capacity of parliamentary diplomacy to achieve progress on a number of issues which it has not yet been possible to resolve through official government policy.”

However, this decision soon triggered an institutional conflict with the European Parliament (EP), which did not take part in the CSCM process, but had been the primary driving force behind the establishment in 1998 of the Parliamentary Forum of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, transformed in 2004 into the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) and, in 2008, into the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM-PA). The EP President Josep Borell Fontelles addressed official letters to the Presidents of national parliaments of the European Union, inviting them not to support the establishment of PAM, in order to avoid costly duplications in an area already covered by the EMPA. Nonetheless, after a few months of deliberation, all members attending the preparatory meeting of the


12 Albania, Algeria, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Palestine, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Syria, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Tunisia and Turkey.


14 Cortajarena Iturrioz, *The Development of Interparliamentary Cooperation among the Mediterranean Countries*, Parliamentary Assembly of the Western European Union, Doc. 1875, para. 41.

inaugural session of PAM (Naples, Italy, June 2005) reaffirmed their national parliaments’ support for the decision to establish PAM as originally agreed. As a consequence, PAM could hold its first plenary session in Amman in September 2006.

The bulk of PAM’s mandate is twofold and consists, on the one hand, in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and crisis management through parliamentary diplomacy, and, on the other hand, in promoting human rights and democracy. As to the first dimension, Article 3 of its Statute states that PAM’s mission is to develop cooperation between its members by promoting political dialogue and understanding, notably by: fostering and building confidence among Mediterranean states; promoting regional security, stability and peace; and consolidating the endeavours of Mediterranean states. Even though democracy and human rights are not explicitly mentioned, they are extensively dealt with in plenary and committee resolutions and declarations. For instance, the Final Declaration of the PAM inaugural session (Amman, 2006) expresses the hope that the creation of the Assembly will assist in the consolidation and deepening of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Similarly, the “Charter of the Mediterranean”, i.e., PAM’s political manifesto unanimously adopted at its 3rd plenary session (Monaco, 2008), mentions democracy and human rights as the core values laying down “the foundation stones for the actions of PAM”.

Each of PAMs’ 27 national delegations can be represented by a maximum of five members, elected or appointed by and from among national parliaments, with equal voting and decision-making powers. In addition to the plenary Assembly, which meets once a year generally for a three-day session, the core of PAM’s work is conducted within three standing committees, which deal with: political and security-related cooperation; economic, social and environmental cooperation; and dialogue among civilisations and human rights. The continuity of PAM’s work is assured by a Bureau, composed of the Assembly’s President, elected for a two-year term, four vice-Presidents and the Presidents of the three standing committees, as well as a permanent Secretariat, established in Malta in November 2007.

The genesis of PAM, its strict link to the IPU and the CSCM process, and its twofold mandate, have affected its internal structure, composition and functioning in a variety of ways. First of all, the mandate of PAM’s standing committees reflects the tried and tested CSCE/CSCM system of three different baskets. Moreover, as with the IPU, the composition of national delegations and the appointment, removal or substitution of individual members are decided at the sole discretion of national parliaments. PAM’s statutory rules simply invite members to include “male and female parliamentarians in their delegation” (Article 11), but, for instance, contain no provision requiring delegations to guarantee a fair and balanced representation of the various political orientations existing in national assemblies. Put bluntly, the Assembly seems to show no interest in ensuring the “input legitimacy” of its members, that is in evaluating whether they are MPs in the western liberal sense of the word, or whether they are “parliamentary arms of governing elites” arriving at PAM to defend national positions in the same way diplomats do in intergovernmental conferences.

This practice is partially in contrast with the approach adopted by other IPIs, especially those inter-regional parliamentary assemblies where the EP is represented, including the UfM-PA, but also the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly or the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly. In all these parliamentary fora,
the EP is increasingly invoking, although not always in a consistent way, the need to respect minimum legitimacy criteria for their counterparts to be accepted as members of these assemblies. Thus, for instance, in connection to the recent upheavals in the Arab world, the UfM PA has suspended the membership of Syria as well as Libya’s observer status. PAM has not endorsed a similar approach: not only has it never considered the suspension of any delegation, but when the Syrian delegation could not attend the 9th PAM session in Monaco (2015) due to the refusal of the French authorities to issue transit visas, on the ground that some of the Syrian members were the subject of EU sanctions, PAM’s President Francesco Amoruso (Italy), in his inaugural speech, openly blamed France for the absence of the Syrians.23 Undoubtedly, the PAM’s approach may appear as rather inconsistent with its stated efforts aimed at promoting democracy and the rule of law in the region. However, it may be seen as functional to its “diplomatic mission”. Indeed, as observed by De Vrieze, the fact that PAM works with all the parliaments of the region enables it to get involved in various initiatives of parliamentary diplomacy and mediation, including facilitating UN missions and conveying messages from the leadership of the EU to the representatives of the Syrian Government and Parliament.24 To use the words of the former PAM President Rudy Salles (France), “the spirit of PAM is to create dialogue and respect differences of opinion, and […] no single Member State will ever be condemned under the auspices of PAM”.25

What kinds of functions and tools have been adopted by PAM to implement its conflict resolution and democracy promotion mandates? To begin with, since PAM is an autonomous parliamentary institution and has no intergovernmental counterpart, it cannot exercise “core” parliamentary functions, such as policy making and oversight over the executive. In general terms, its powers are of a deliberative nature, consisting in the possibility to adopt non-legally binding reports, opinions, resolutions, recommendations and declarations, which are regularly transmitted to national parliaments and governments, regional organisations and international forums. These “soft diplomacy” tools are in principle adopted by consensus or, if this cannot be mustered, by a four-fifths majority of the votes cast. Once again, this practice is consistent with the PAM’s role as a “centre of excellence for regional parliamentary diplomacy”, where dialogue and consensus are preferred to confrontation and harsh debates.

However, the literature on IPIs has identified several less conventional parliamentary functions that are related both to conflict prevention and resolution, and to the promotion and consolidation of democracy, human rights and rule of law.26 Due to space limitations, the next two sections will assess PAM’s activities only in connection to four of such functions: those of “norm entrepreneurship” and technical assistance as far as democracy promotion is concerned; and those of a “moral tribune” and parliamentary diplomacy per se with regard to conflict resolution and crisis management.

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23 He stated: “It is with great regret that I must inform the Assembly of the absence of the Syrian delegation, who could not attend our meeting because of the refusal of the French authorities to issue transit visas. It is a very serious circumstance, considering the very nature of our Assembly as an instrument of parliamentary diplomacy at the service of peace and regional security. I personally notified the position of the Presidency of the PAM to the ambassador of France in Italy,” Address by H.E. Sen. Francesco Amoruso President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, 9th PAM Plenary Session, Principality of Monaco (2-4 February 2015), available at www.pam.int/default.asp?m=news&id=586 (latest access: February 2015).
24 Franklin De Vrieze, Study on Parliamentary Cooperation, Mapping and Analysis of International Parliamentary Institutions and Parliamentary Networks in the Western Balkans and South East Europe, European Commission, 2015, p. 41.
PAM’s Promotion of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law: A Norm Entrepreneur “on Paper”?

Between 2006 and 2014, PAM held eight plenary sessions, during which 24 resolutions were adopted on a wide range of issues dealing with democracy, human rights and the rule of law, especially drawing on the work of the first and third standing committees. Some of the most debated issues include: religious freedom and dialogue among cultures; the fight against organised crime (including “Eco-Mafias”)27 in the Mediterranean; the definition and root causes of terrorism; forced migrations; gender and equality issues; education; job creation and unemployment in the Mediterranean; corruption; rights of persons with disabilities (the full list of adopted resolutions is reported in Table 1 below).

However, what qualifies the role of PAM as a norm entrepreneur is the fact that some of these resolutions do not simply reaffirm the validity of universally recognised human rights principle but try to reinterpret them. On the one hand, there has been a clear attempt by PAM members to propose new international legal concepts and definitions. In this sense, the most prominent example is the resolution on the definition of terrorism, adopted in 2009 by the 4th PAM plenary session. This outcome is dubious because this subject remains one of the most vehemently debated ones in international bodies.28 The resolution defines terrorism as:

[…] violence or the threat of violence, induced by political, ideological, religious or ethnic motives. Terrorist actions are carried out or designed to achieve maximum publicity, and to produce effects beyond the immediate damage to people, property and the environment. The methods used are extreme, destruction is ruthless, and the behaviour is not constrained by the rules of war. The nature of violence is such so as to provoke fear and intimidation.29

The resolution was adopted by a large majority of parliamentary delegations. Only France expressed its reservation about the legal implications of acts of terrorism committed by states (preamble paragraph 14 of the resolution), while Israel did not take part in voting. Further attempts have been made over time, less successfully, to define other crimes, such as “forced migrations” (4th plenary session, 2009) and “organised waste trafficking” (7th session, 2012).

On the other hand, PAM has repeatedly sought to harmonise member states’ legislation. Even though it has not followed the example of other IPIs by adopting formal “model laws”,30 PAM has frequently called on the participating national parliaments to adapt their legal and institutional frameworks to international standards in a number of fields, including family law (4th plenary session, 2009), electoral gender quotas (5th plenary session, 2010), domestic violence (6th plenary session, 2011), access of people with disabilities to the labour market, and strategies to combat public sector corruption (8th session, 2014).

However, the main limit of this strategy is that the Assembly has not set up a systematic follow-up mechanism to assess the level of implementation of its recommendations. Moreover, all the informative reports produced by its rapporteurs are essentially of a thematic nature, and contain only general information regarding specific country situations. As a consequence, it is not possible to evaluate the extent to which the norms proposed by the Assembly have been effectively accepted and internalised by Mediterranean national parliaments. Thus, PAM’s role as a norm entrepreneur is seriously hampered by this institutionalized deficit.

Furthermore, PAM has made a limited use of classical technical cooperation tools to promote democracy and the rule of law, such as election observation, technical assistance for constitutional and legal

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27 The report “Eco-mafias and their impact on the Mediterranean”, unanimously adopted on 12 October 2012, during the 7th PAM Plenary Session (Malta), employs the term “eco-mafia” to refer to “criminal organisations that commit crimes which damage the environment” (para. 2).

28 Due to complex political and legal problems, there is no universal agreement on a comprehensive definition of terrorism in public international law. Since 2000, the United Nations General Assembly has been negotiating a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, including a definition of terrorism, but has been unable to finalise it so far. As a way of getting round the problem, the international community has either adopted a number of sectoral conventions, aimed at criminalising specific types of terrorist activities (such as the taking of hostages in civil aviation, financing terrorism, etc.), or agreed upon non-binding definitions (see, in particular, the general definition contained in the Security Council Resolution 1566 of October 2004). Moreover, other international organisations have their own official definitions of terrorism, including the 2002 EU Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism.


30 For instance, this is the case with the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Eurasian Economic Community.
reforms, training seminars for parliamentarians and staff, study tours, and civil society empowerment. During the period analysed in this article, PAM has not deployed any autonomous election observation mission, while it deployed only one technical cooperation mission – that to Bosnia Herzegovina between 2009 and 2011, which sought to contribute to the country’s constitutional reform process.\(^{31}\)

With the outbreak of the so-called Arab Spring, PAM’s members are becoming increasingly aware of the need to strengthen the Assembly’s work on the promotion of democracy. This perception is confirmed, for instance, by the words of MP Michel Vauzelle (France), who, during the 7\(^{th}\) plenary session (2012), invoked the necessity to consolidate the work achieved by PAM in the five years of its existence, “especially as regards sustaining the democratic expectations of the countries to the South Mediterranean”\(^{32}\).

### TABLE 1  
**PAM’s resolutions on crisis management and the promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law (2006-2014)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Standing Committee: Political and Security-Related Cooperation</th>
<th>Third Standing Committee: Dialogue among Civilisations and Human Rights</th>
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| **2\(^{nd}\) Plenary Session**  
Malta (2007)  
| – Regional issues - the Middle East | – Dialogue and human rights |
| **3\(^{rd}\) Plenary Session**  
Monaco (2008)  
| – “Charter of the Mediterranean”  
| – The work of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Middle East in 2008 | – Gender and equality issues  
| | – Migration  
| | – Religious freedom and dialogue of cultures |
| **4\(^{th}\) Plenary Session**  
Turkey (2009)  
| – The Middle East  
| – The fight against organised crime in the Mediterranean  
| – The definition of terrorism | – Building on dialogue  
| | – Forced migration  
| | – Women in political life in the Mediterranean |
| **5\(^{th}\) Plenary Session**  
Morocco (2010)  
| – The Middle East  
| – Organised crime  
| – The root causes of terrorism | – Intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the Western Balkans  
| | – Palestinian women refugees  
| | – Achieving gender equality |
| **6\(^{th}\) Plenary Session**  
Italy (2011)  
| – The Middle East  
| – Organised crime  
| – New strategies and perspectives in countering terrorism | – Migrations and revolutions  
| | – Domestic violence |
| **7\(^{th}\) Plenary Session**  
Malta (2012)  
| – Middle East peace process and events in the Arab world  
| – Eco-Mafias and their impact on the Mediterranean | – Education  
| | – Job creation and unemployment in the Mediterranean |

\(^{31}\) Information on the mission is contained in the report “Constitutional Changes in Bosnia and Herzegovina”, Rapporteur: Hon. Miro Petek (Slovenia), discussed during the 6\(^{th}\) Plenary Session (2011).

\(^{32}\) Executive report of the PAM’s 7\(^{th}\) plenary session (Malta, 2012), pp. 3-4.
Parliamentary Diplomacy at the Service of Conflict Resolution and Crisis Management

PAM’s parliamentary diplomacy activity aimed at conflict resolution and crisis management can be divided into two distinct phases. During its first four years of existence (2006-2010), PAM’s parliamentary diplomacy was almost totally absorbed by the Middle East conflict, while other conflicts in the region, such as Cyprus and the Western Sahara, did not appear at the top of its agenda. Much of the Assembly’s work was carried out by the first standing committee and its ad hoc committee on the Middle East, established at the second plenary session (2007). In this respect, the Assembly behaved first and foremost as a “moral tribunal”, taking a clear stance on the need to find a “just and durable” solution to the conflict. The resolutions adopted at each plenary session since 2006, very often by consensus, clarify the Assembly’s position on the conflict, which can summed up by the following excerpts:

- favouring a two-state solution based on relevant UN resolutions;
- condemnation of all acts of terrorism, whether perpetrated by individuals, organisations or a state;
- condemnation, on the one side, of the Israeli military intervention in Gaza in December 2008 and January 2009 as well as the blockade of the Gaza strip; on the other side, of the launching of rockets by Hamas militants into Southern Israel;
- calling for the dismantling of the “wall of separation”;
- urging Israel to refrain from settlement-building activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem;
- calling for a credible and transparent international enquiry to assess the succession of events that led to the death of nine activists of the “Free Gaza” movement on 31 May 2010;
- calling for intra-Palestinian reconciliation;
- calling for confidence-building measures by Israel and the Palestinians, like prisoner releases;
- judging the Palestinian’s request for recognition of the State of Palestine by the UN as “legitimate, justified, merited, and long overdue”.

Over time, PAM has also sought to strengthen its visibility and “presence on the ground”, mainly by carrying out diplomatic, fact-finding and inquiry missions. The first fact-finding mission in Gaza was organised in May 2009 by the PAM Bureau. The objective was to get a perspective on the consequences of the December 2008/January 2009 conflict, as well as to express solidarity with all innocent victims of the confrontation. Moreover, the Bureau also sought to enhance PAM’s visibility among the key actors in the region, through meetings with political leaders in Egypt, Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, and to present PAM as a serious and trustworthy partner for future peace negotiations.33 A second mission was organised in November 2013, when a high-level PAM delegation visited Amman, Ramallah and Jerusalem, in order to discuss, among other things, the crossborder impact of the Syrian conflict and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process with the Jordanian, Palestinian and Israeli authorities.

Moreover, PAM has always supported, through its parliamentary diplomatic network, the efforts of the UN, the Quartet and the international community to relaunch direct and indirect talks among the parties and to find solutions to the permanent status issues of the conflict. In this respect, in February 2010 in Malta it organised, together with the UN, an “International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace” in order to address the five permanent status issues: borders, Jerusalem, settlements, refugees, and water.34

33 PAM, Report on the mission to Middle East by the PAM Bureau (18–21 May 2009), 4th Plenary Session (2009).
34 PAM, Report on the joint PAM/UN meeting in support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, 5th Plenary Session (2010).
The second phase of PAM’s work (2011-2014) corresponds with the outbreak of the Arab Spring, which opened a window of opportunity by allowing PAM to expand both the geographic scope and the objectives of its parliamentary diplomacy. PAM’s role was particularly crucial in three areas: providing financial support, assisting in constitutional reform processes, and facilitating political missions and humanitarian aid.

Firstly, when it comes to financial support, in 2012 PAM managed, through its ongoing cooperation with the major European financial institutions, to facilitate a number of investments and make available an amount of 2.5 billion euros to finance pilot projects in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia. The long-term sustainability of these projects was ensured by a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and PAM in 2013.

Secondly, PAM’s technical assistance in constitutional reforms mainly addressed Tunisia and, at least until December 2013, Libya. PAM was indeed among the first parliamentary delegations to meet with the new Tunisian authorities. It assisted the country in all the phases of the constitutional reform process. As for Libya, in 2012 IPU and PAM sent a joint mission to the country endeavouring to help its authorities to re-establish a fully functioning parliament. Moreover, in 2013 PAM organised parliamentary training sessions abroad to Libyan MPs. However, the highly volatile situation that emerged in the country towards the end of 2013 forced PAM to suspend its assistance programme.

Thirdly, PAM’s engagement in Libya aimed also at mobilising humanitarian aid and supporting the various UN missions in the country. In 2011, it assisted the UN Envoy mission to Misrata in securing a humanitarian corridor. Over time, however, the Assembly’s attention turned to the Syrian conflict. PAM was among the regional actors invited to participate at the 1st Syria Humanitarian Forum, held in Geneva on 8 March 2012. On that occasion, PAM offered its full support, through its regional parliamentary network, to humanitarian efforts and political dialogue in Syria, in view of its previous collaboration with the UN System in the 2011 Libyan crisis. From 28 June to 2 July 2013, PAM fielded a mission to Syria and Lebanon in order to address the delicate issues of humanitarian assistance, humanitarian aid delivery and confidence-building measures. In Damascus, PAM delegates met with representatives of the UN as well as Syrian MPs. The MPs were urged to help reduce the level of violence, scale up the protection of civilian population and enhance the conditions for humanitarian aid. One of the major problems observed by PAM was poor communication between humanitarian agencies and the Syrian Government. As a consequence, PAM proposed that frequent meetings between humanitarian agencies and the Syrian National High Relief Committee could be a step towards addressing this problem. During consultations, issues related to the problematic supply of arms to the parties in conflict by outside actors, the sanctions against Syria which pose an obstacle to an improvement of the humanitarian situation, attacks on UN convoys, as well as detentions and interrogations of political activists, were some of the central themes. Moreover, the PAM delegation took the opportunity to strengthen the communication between the key international actors by transmitting messages from the UN and the EU to the Syrian Government[35].

Finally, in 2014 PAM launched an initiative to establish a pool of MPs, ready to travel at short notice to critical areas, in order to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance, the protection of civilians, the respect for human rights, and the negotiation processes. The initiative received open support by several UN bodies, including the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the High Commissioner for Refugees and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Conclusions

The empirical analysis of PAM’s work during its first eight years of existence allows one to conclude that the Assembly’s activities have been much more focused on crisis management and conflict resolution than on “traditional” democracy and human rights promotion.

Indeed, the record of PAM’s activities in terms of the promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law can be summarised as follows: one technical mission to Bosnia Herzegovina between 2009 and 2011; an attempt to advance new international legal concepts and definitions; and various proposals aimed at harmonising national legislation with international human rights standards. However, since PAM established no mechanism to follow-up its recommendations, its role as a norm entrepreneur runs a high risk of

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remaining such merely on paper. This institutional deficit is not of secondary importance if one considers that, after all, one of the keys to the success of the CSCE has been its capacity to monitor the compliance of member states with agreed standards (through the so-called “dispositif de suivi”). Thus, establishing such an oversight institutional mechanism should be a priority for the policy makers and diplomats involved. In this sense, the PAM may benefit from the experience of other IPIs, such as the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly’s Rose-Roth seminars, or the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The latter, for instance, has established in the 1990s an ad hoc Monitoring Committee, which is responsible for verifying the fulfilment of obligations assumed by member states under the Statute of the Council of Europe and the key European human rights conventions.

On the other hand, a more proactive role has been played by PAM in terms of regional parliamentary diplomacy aimed at crisis management and conflict resolution. In a first phase (2006-2010), its commitment mainly took the form of a moral tribunal addressing the Arab-Israeli conflict. Even though its diplomatic effort did not produce immediate practical results in terms of rapprochement between the parties, PAM was able to present itself as a trustworthy partner for possible future peace negotiations. After all, PAM represents one of the few international forums where the Israeli and Palestinian parliamentary delegations can meet and engage in direct talks, even though the Israeli participation to PAM sessions has been rather irregular. Subsequently, the Arab Spring has created the conditions for a more direct parliamentary engagement on the ground, especially through the political activism of PAM’s Secretariat and Bureau. However, this diplomatic work essentially aimed either: (a) to increase PAM’s visibility, which is an understandable objective if one considers the fact that PAM is a relatively recent institution operating in a regional environment already densely populated by “concurrent” intergovernmental and parliamentary initiatives; or (b) to support and facilitate initiatives launched by third parties, in particular the UN and IPU.

Only in 2014 did PAM launch a truly autonomous initiative, consisting in the establishment of a sort of parliamentary “standby units” for rapid deployment in critical areas. Indeed, one of the main constraints that PAM faces is that many of the key actors for the Mediterranean security and stability, including the US, Russia and partially the EU, are external to the region and do not have full membership, or even observer status, in the Assembly. One way to overcome this may be to gradually strengthen the role of PAM as a “hub” providing much-needed coordination of the numerous multilateral initiatives on Mediterranean security. A first step towards this could consist in assessing the state of affairs of the main current initiatives affecting the Mediterranean, in order to identify their major strengths and pitfalls and to formulate useful policy recommendations, a function that after all is not very far from that exercised by parliamentary inquiry committees at the national level.

Overall, if these endogenous and exogenous constraints are overcome, in the long term, PAM can play a key role in the development of a truly Mediterranean region, by facilitating its coherence and the build-up of common values, thus also laying the foundation for a more solid intergovernmental cooperation.