



**PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANEE**

المتوسط الأبيض للبحر البرلمانية الجمعية

Statement by Hon. Eleni Avlonitou, member of the Hellenic Parliament

on the occasion of the

Regional Workshop

for Members of Parliaments, Media and Stakeholders

on Climate Change Adaptation in the Mediterranean Coastal Area

Athens, 5 November 2015

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Professor Scoullou,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today and representing the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean in this important event. I wish to thank the Mediterranean Information Office for Environment Culture and Sustainable Development (MIO-ECSDE) and Professor Scoullou himself for the invitation addressed to PAM.

Before talking about the issues on the agenda, I would like to take this opportunity to spend a few words to introduce our Assembly to those of you who are not familiar with it. PAM is an international organization established in 2005, and its main objective is to forge political, economic and social cooperation among the member states in order to find common solutions to the challenges facing the region, in order to achieve peace and prosperity for the Mediterranean peoples.

The United Nations General Assembly granted the status of Permanent Observer to PAM in 2009, and this puts our Assembly in a privileged position vis-a-vis the UN system.

Climate Change represents a priority for our Assembly, which has approached the topic from several angles, due to the large variety of implications and importance that climate change has reached throughout the last decades.

Our region is extremely vulnerable because of its very diverse; Southern Europe is affected in terms of impact on economic activities, and North Africa faces the consequences of climate change even to a greater extent, mostly in terms of desertification and decrease of precipitation. The Mediterranean region is also directly susceptible to other phenomena, such as rising sea levels, floods and storms. Moreover, the increasing occurrences of these extreme weather events directly menace the agricultural resources of our countries, with dire impacts in terms of food security.

For these reasons, PAM has constantly addressed the issue of Climate Change since its establishment, underlining the strong commitment of our parliamentarians to play their role of legislators at the national level, but also to give their contribution at the international level, for example within the framework of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Already in 2009, PAM gathered representatives of parliaments from the entire world and produced the “Malta declaration of the commitment by Parliamentarians to COP15 and beyond”, which was presented at the Conference of Parties in Copenhagen. Although the results of the COP15 were not those that the world was aiming for, negotiations were not stopped and significant steps ahead have been made, in terms of climate change finance, capacity building, and technology development and transfer.

Since Copenhagen, our Assembly has been regularly contributing and following up on the activities of the UNFCCC, particularly the meetings of the Conference of Parties, in order to foster awareness building amongst Mediterranean parliamentarians about this critical issue. To do this, we take advantage of our privileged relations with the United Nations System, which constantly participates and contributes to our meeting. I am referring, for example, to the relationship between PAM and World Meteorological Organizations, the UNEP and the other UN agencies with a specific mandate on this crucial issue.

Even this year, we will bring the voice of the Mediterranean parliamentarians to the UN World Climate Change Conference, which will take place in Paris, in December. We all hope that Paris will set a milestone for Climate Change policies, and we are already planning a parliamentary event, in spring 2016, to discuss the implications of the decisions that will be taken in Paris for the Mediterranean region, which is particularly vulnerable to the effects of Climate Change. Last week, PAM Secretary General met with UN Assistant Secretary General on Climate Change Janos Pasztor in order to discuss some synergies for the Paris event.

PAM also participated at the Mediterranean Climate Summit, the MEDCOP 21, held in Marseille on 4-5 June 2015 and aimed at underlining the role of civil society in addressing climate change, in a renewed cooperation perspective. The event highlighted the relevance of local authorities, associations, businesses, and networks working as catalysts for sustainable development. Civil society plays a fundamental role and it must continue to do so, because the citizens of the world demand a change on the path of green energy, sustainable development and respect for the environment.

Now, I would like to give you just an example on how PAM concretely contributes to the efforts of the international community on climate-change-related issues: we all know that the sectors that contribute the most to global warming are those related to energy, transports and housing. One of the proposals included in the Report on environment adopted at the PAM 9th Plenary Session, held in Monaco last January, was the establishment of a Carbon Added Tax (CAT). It is a very simple tax, based on the mechanism of the Value Added Tax (VAT). Its main purpose is to be a deterrent, because it is designed to discourage the use of fossil fuels, the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, it aims to set a price on carbon: all economic agents that with their work emit, or whose products have consumed “carbon content”, have to bear the economic cost of these emissions. CAT is not aimed at "punishing" consumers of fossil fuels, nor consumers of energy, nor to blame them. A high price has, in fact, the effect of discouraging the use of that good, and at the same time, it sends the signal that consumers should prefer, whenever possible, those technologies that allow saving the expensive resource. This approach is effective if we consider that in Paris there will be no binding targets for the single countries. Everything will be based on good will.

Another important topic is represented by subsidies: according to IMF sources, oil, gas and coal companies are benefitting from subsidies to the tune of \$5.3 billion annually. This does not help the transition to green energy sources. On this, developing countries should be assisted to lower their dependence on fossil fuels and to build less energy-intensive cities and transport. However, the current low price of oil does not facilitate this approach.

We are at a crossroad: our world is going through major changes, reflected also in the Post 2015 agenda, which was adopted a last September in New York, on the occasion of the 70th United Nation General Assembly. PAM was present, in its capacity as Permanent Observer to the UN General Assembly, with a high level delegation. The Post 2015 agenda expresses the general commitment of all countries in reaching, in the next fifteen years, 17 objectives aimed at fighting poverty and the huge social differences through paths of economic growth that, at the same time, can satisfy people’s needs and can preserve the environment. Everything needs to be done in a global and integrated sustainability perspective.

This is a crucial time for the planet, maybe not much for us, but it is fundamental for the future generations. We have to work together to solve these problems now, because in 20, 30 year time from now the next generation will not be in a condition to take effective action.

The post-2015 agenda states clearly that it is time to look beyond national boundaries and short-term interests, because no-one can succeed working alone. The motto of the new agenda, “Leave no one behind”, is also a good sign. The new development agenda is centred on people, and it marks a major change, because it underlines that the process needs to be – and must be – inclusive: national and local governments, parliaments, civil society, the private sector, scientists and academia.

As you all know, one of the hottest issues on climate change is financing, and adaptation represents a big part of it. Most of the existing international financing instruments for adaptation are replenished through voluntary contributions. However, due to financial disparities, the implementation of adaptation policies are too often set aside and their capacities change a lot from

country to country in the Mediterranean. Adaptation is a multi-faced issue and requires an institutional dimension which should allow to plan and implement energy transition policies. This issue should be addressed at government level by the Parliamentarians who have, as lawmakers, full legitimacy to call their governments to develop the required adaptation policies.

Even on this, there are some new elements in the picture, for instance the increasing role of the World Bank. The World Bank was warmly encouraged by Ban ki-moon himself to play a leading role on this, not only to mobilize funding and to attract additional regional and sub-regional financing institutions, but also for the expertise that the World Bank can count on. The appointment of the new CEO of the Sustainable Energy for All – who has a past as Vice President in the World Bank – is a clear sign of this new direction taken by the UN itself.

In this framework, our parliamentarians are fully committed to support, through their legislative prerogatives, the efforts of all relevant international actors in this crucial sector for our region. In New York, on the occasion of the United Nations General Assembly, Mr. Wu Hongbo, the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, has sought the cooperation of PAM in order to get the assistance, at the legislative level, of our 28 member parliaments in support of the implementation of the Post 2015 agenda. The PAM delegation in New York accepted this request, and we will work closely with the UN Department on Economic and Social Affairs on this topic.

Of course, adaptation, mitigation, resilience and innovation are now essential in reducing the expected impacts of climate change on humans and their environment, but neither adaptation to climate change nor mitigation alone avoid all climate change impacts: they can complement each other and together significantly reduce the risks of climate change. A wide range of options on how to adapt to a changing climate is available, but more adaptation than is happening now is needed in order to reduce vulnerability. To give you some examples, in the Mediterranean we could implement adaptation strategies such as water desalination, human health related actions that plan to cope with threats from extreme heat, better climate-sensitive disease surveillance and control.

Adaptation is a much more pressing priority at present than mitigation due to the imminence of unavoidable damaging impacts. Adaptation is necessary both in the short and long terms to address impacts resulting from the warming that could occur even if we make massive cuts in emissions. Creating synergies between adaptation and mitigation can increase the cost-effectiveness of actions and make them more attractive to receive funds.

The PAM members of parliament are fully committed to continue their work in order to contribute, as much as possible, to the actions taken at the regional and international level, and we look forward to see the outcome of this meeting, in order to inform our member parliaments.

Thank you for your attention.