

## **FORUM FOR THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY**

**LIMASSOL, CYPRUS, 13-14 OCTOBER 2011**

by Afrodite Bampasi<sup>1</sup>, representative of AFEM at the Forum

The Council of Europe, together with the Republic of Cyprus, organized its 7<sup>th</sup> Forum for the Future of Democracy 2011, “The Interdependence of Democracy and Social Cohesion”, in Cyprus from 13 to 14 of October 2011. The Forum, which is a mixture of plenary events and thematic working sessions, is a multi-partner process which aims to strengthen transversal understanding of the issues under review and foster cross-sectoral approaches. Its specificity lies in bringing together representatives of governments, local and regional authorities and civil society.

This year’s Forum started with an opening speech by Mr. D. Christofias, president of the Republic of Cyprus, followed by addresses by Mr Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr. K. Gryshchenko, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers, Ms Lenia Samuel, Deputy Director General, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, European Commission, and A. Christou, Mayor of Limassol and Head of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. Mr Jagland highlighted the “very serious financial and fiscal crisis. We are starting to see an impact of this crisis on social cohesion as well as on public trust in our democratic institutions.” He continued: “There is widespread perception that social and economic justice is being neglected in an effort to safeguard the interests and profits of the financial sector.” Regarding the contribution of the Council of Europe, Mr Jagland added: “ The Council of Europe can make an important contribution to issues of social cohesion in a social rights and human rights perspective, in particular in relation to youth, ageing, inter-generational solidarity, migration, education and the fight against extremism and hate speech.”

Ms Lenia Samuel spoke about the importance of equal access of all to economic and social rights, without which democracy and freedom cannot exist. Ms Samuel added that social cohesion is being challenged these days.

The main and continuous topic of discussion throughout the Forum was the crisis of democracy which is occurring together with the economic crisis. The participants

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highlighted the need of the people in Europe but also in the Mediterranean area, for a more participative democracy, a real democracy such as the “indignados” movement in Spain and in other countries is fighting for.

In the working session “Creating and improving processes for participation by all members of society”, speakers for the above movements spoke about innovatory, participatory and direct democracy structures, which have been successfully introduced at local level. As social rights are deteriorating, it is particularly challenging that all the members of society are involved in participation processes.

The working session “Enhancing civic dialogue and social solidarity for the wellbeing”, focused on the economic and social disparities between the rich and the vulnerable populations in Europe which are weakening the human bonds of solidarity and shared responsibility. The reality discussed was that of the current recession and financial crisis which are deteriorating the daily life of many Europeans, making people fearful of the future. The need for a movement for the democratization of social policy, socio-economic security and deliberative democracy was analyzed by Professor Guy Standing.

In the closing discussion concerns were raised about the effectiveness of international institutions, such as the Council of Europe. Participants from civil society pointed out the need for further democratization of international and European organizations and institutions. They felt that the Council of Europe should meet the challenge and be an example in the world.

Afrodite Bampasi, representative of AFEM at the Forum, disseminated the French and English text of the Declaration of AFEM and the Marangopoulos Foundation for Human Rights “Reinforcing social rights in order to exit the economic crisis”, which is supported by the Conference of the 400 INGOs enjoying participative status with the Council of Europe, which constitute the Council of Europe 4<sup>th</sup> Pillar.