Speech of Professor Rami Hamdallah, President of An-Najah National University, to the conference on "The Latium University system within the integration process between the two shores of the Mediterranean"
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“The Euro-Mediterranean Integration Process and Palestinian Higher Education: The Case of An-Najah National University”

Honored Chairman,
Distinguished Board & Staff Members of UNIMED
Distinguished Participants,
Honorable Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of An-Najah National University, I would like to extend our sincere appreciation to (name of university or organization) for hosting this conference and to thank all of those who worked to organize this important gathering of educators and intellectuals. Special thanks are due to UNIMED Board and Staff and to all of the members of this vital network of universities.

The discussion of the Euro-Mediterranean integration process takes on special importance more than ever before, particularly at this stage in history due to the fact that the forces of divisiveness and fragmentation globally and regionally, have not lost impetus but on the contrary have gained more momentum especially in our region of the eastern Mediterranean.

We certainly share the responsibility for the failure or success of the different suggested schemes of integration. Indeed, this is not the time for apathy or negativity; we have to act fervently and unite our efforts to achieve a better future for our countries and peoples.

The Barcelona Process, as a grand scheme of cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean, has offered an elaborate framework and mechanisms for multi-lateral and bilateral partnership between countries in our region. There are, however, differing evaluative views about its accomplishments over the past eleven years and about its future prospects in the coming period. Of course, everyone’s evaluation of any process is contextual and should be understood accordingly. In view of that I have to emphasize that Palestinian evaluation of the Barcelona Process is unique since we are not living in a sovereign state and we are still living under the tyranny of the Israeli Military occupation. We had high hopes that the Barcelona Process will aid in the realization of peace in our region and we participated enthusiastically in many of the resultant Euro-Med partnership programs. Our university, as a leading institute of higher education in Palestine, actively joined several Euro-Med projects and contributed greatly to their success.
Many of our Academic faculties and Scientific Centers were involved in the implementation of Euro-Med projects with European and Mediterranean universities:

- We were involved in the Euro-Med Heritage I & II Programs and the Heritage Mediterranean Program in partnership with UNIMED.
- We were involved in several Tempus Projects in the fields of Energy Conservation, University-Industry Links, and e-learning.
- We also implemented several bilateral projects with European universities in different fields.

Likewise we see the UNIMED network as a good scheme of integration between universities in the region. Although UNIMED predates the initiation of the Barcelona Process we believe that the underlying philosophy of regional cooperation is present in both. Thus we hope that the revitalization of the Barcelona Process will contribute to the development of UNIMED and vise versa since academics can aid politicians in shaping and correcting political discourse.

However, when we speak of integration as a process we should remember that we are not speaking in a singular mode and that there are many processes that need to be taken into consideration. As educators, I believe we all understand the complexity and interconnectedness of the multitude of the processes that must be considered. We cannot talk about educational and cultural integration schemes without addressing the political and economic aspects. Thus integration processes are not mutually exclusive and should not be treated as such.

Having said this, I would like to emphasize that without progress in the political process, advancements in the education field shall be handicapped. This is most evident in the Palestinian case, for how can we talk about cooperation between the shores of the Mediterranean when our students and teachers cannot come freely to the university and they are humiliated on a daily basis on the Israeli check points? How can we talk about cooperation when our students and professors are being imprisoned without proper due process, in what is called “Administrative Detention” which is illegal according to all international laws and covenants.

We are doing our best to function as a normal university despite the obstacles and violations of the Israeli Occupation Authorities. We are trying to proceed forward by utilizing the concepts of Total Quality Management (TQM) and Strategic Planning. The problems and obstacles we face have been identified and classified and we are devising action-oriented remedies and solutions on the short and long runs to be employed in a gradual fashion.

Accordingly, we would like to stress that practical steps should be taken to increase the efficiency of utilizations of financial resources and funding. We hope that more financial resources will be allocated to training schemes and to the procurement of much needed equipment in the disadvantaged countries of the Euromed partnership and in areas that are still under the domination of military occupation as in our case. We see the formation of consortia of universities of 3 to 5 universities from the two shores of the
Mediterranean as a practical framework for the implementation of joint projects in different fields capitalizing on specialization and taking complementarities into consideration.

Our new proposals for development are in accordance with our strategic vision. We want to develop our higher education focusing on key sectors that are compatible with worldwide developments and that contribute efficiently to the progress of Palestinian society.

Our future development plans include the following:

- To complete the construction of our new campus. We have already completed the first phase with a cost of approximately 45 million dollars and we are continuing our efforts to complete the second and third phases which include a new administration building, a modern library building, a student activities center, restaurants and commercial stores, scientific centers complex, a mosque, an open amphitheater, and an educational hospital building.

- The University Hospital shall be dedicated for the teaching and training of medical students and medical practitioners and shall serve the Northern region of the West Bank and other regions in Palestine. We believe this is a vital project that is highly needed to develop the Palestinian health sector, and we are looking for partners and donors to contribute and support us in the realization of this important educational, developmental, and humanitarian scheme.

- Our development plans also include the construction of an educational TV station. Currently we are the only university in the Palestinian Territories that has a full-fledged FM Radio Station that offers a multitude of educational, cultural, and news programs. The FM station is being utilized to enhance the interaction between the university and the local community. Radio offers an excellent medium of outreach and An-Najah FM Station has a wide listenership in the Governorate of Nablus and throughout the Northern West Bank. The educational TV station shall undoubtedly complement the work that we have begun with our radio station and shall greatly benefit the university and the Palestinian community on the local and national levels. Here, I hope we will benefit from European experience in this regard. We can benefit from Euro-Med Audiovisual Project and I would also suggest that a revival of the Euro-Med Media Project could be highly desirable and beneficial for many media professionals and practitioners. We can certainly learn from others and our partners can benefit from our experience.

- We have plans to develop our Information Technology sector. We want to be part of the information age and build a knowledge-based society. We are currently finishing our IT Center of Excellence with Korean funding and we aspire that European aid will complement and further develop this important strategic project.
• We shall continue to support Technical and Vocational Education and Training, and strengthen our links with the local industry and the private sector. We would like to strengthen our ties with the Palestinian Private sector by forging and joining public-private partnership. This could be extended to partners outside Palestine from the other shores of the Mediterranean.

• We would like to strengthen our ties with local, national, and international NGOs.

• We would also like to strengthen what I call Public-public partnership locally and nationally, i.e., the strategic cooperation with other key public institutions in our society like Ministries and Municipalities and here we made good progress. For example, An-Najah has cooperated with several local organizations to form the Nablus Clean and Green Committee (including Nablus Municipality, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture, and other local NGOs with the support from several private sector organizations and companies). Our university is the coordinator for this committee and has actively participated in the implementation of a clean and green campaign for the city. An-Najah students who are finishing their community service requirements through the Community Service Center participated in a week-long activity of planting trees in different parts in the city of Nablus. The campaign shall continue throughout the year and shall have many activities based on community participation and volunteerism.

• On the cultural level, our university has been very active in contributing to the advancement of cultural expression in Palestinian society. An-Najah has become a cradle and incubator for a plethora of cultural activities. Each year our university hosts tens of activities for local and national NGOs: lectures, workshops, conferences, exhibitions, and artistic performances. In this context I would like to say that our university looks forward to get actively involved in the support of the work of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures to improve intercultural understanding between the two shores of the Mediterranean, and of course, with our brothers and sisters in the Latium Region.

I have to stress that we are definitely keen to develop and deepen our international relations. As I have already mentioned, the Barcelona Process and its resultant mechanisms and programs have offered a good framework for cooperation. However, it is imperative that I reiterate that cooperation in the educational and cultural arenas shall remain inadequate if there was no tangible progress in the political and economic spheres. We want to strengthen our international ties on the bilateral and multilateral levels and we have identified the areas of international cooperation as follows:

• Development of university services.
• Development of university infrastructure.
• Institutional capacity building.
• Transfer of technology.
• Transfer of know-how.
• Joint research.
• Scholarships (undergraduate, graduate, postgraduate).
• Specialized training for academic and administrative staff.
• Student-exchange.
• Faculty-exchange.
• Cultural exchange.
• Information exchange.
• And last but not least funding schemes (Grants, loans, etc.).

Here I would like to stress that the issue of funding is very crucial since financial support from the Palestinian National Authority is partial and intermittent, we have to always look for alternative funding from different sources. We hope that the European Commission will commit more funds in support of the different Euro-Med partnership programs, especially scholarship schemes for university students from our region and increase mobility grants for Higher Education staff.

Undoubtedly, without education a culture of peace cannot be developed but also without peace educational and cultural development shall be definitely curtailed. This is a two way street and commuting back and forth on it is indeed essential. For the Barcelona Process to be successful this premise must be fully understood and respected, we cannot bury our heads in the sand and pretend that these two spheres are separate.

Finally, I would like to end with a quote from a Syrian Comedy TV Show in the 1970s in which one of the actors keeps repeating a sentence that says: “If you want to know what is happening in Rome, you have to know what is happening in Brazil.” Besides the humorous resonance of this sentence I believe it is an expression of the effects of globalization on our world. Indeed we are all affected by events that occur in other parts of the planet and we cannot claim the contrary. The two shores of the Mediterranean share a common history and I dare to say a common destiny. It is worthy to note that the word Europe itself is derived from the Phoenician word “Erb” and the Arabic word “Gharb” which means “West”, which is derived from the verb “Yoghrob” which means go into the sunset, since the sun for us sets to the west of us. Europe is therefore is essential to us, since we cannot ignore where the sun sets, and a people who have no sunset will have no sunrise. I think the opposite can be said by our brothers and sisters on the other shores of the Mediterranean.

Thank you