



Statement by Mr. Fathallah Sijilmassi
UfM Secretary-General
UfM Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Change
13 May 2014, Athens

Dear Minister Shakhashir,
Dear Commissioner on Environment, Mr. Potocnik,
Dear Minister Maniatis,
Dear Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I would like to warmly thank **the Greek EU Presidency**, for its welcome today, and for its very active commitment on Mediterranean issues during this semester. Today's Ministerial meeting is one more example thereof.
- I would also like to express my gratitude and congratulations to **the UfM Co-Presidencies**. The current positive momentum in the UfM owes much to the active and effective work conducted hand in hand by both Co-Presidents, the EU and Jordan.

Today's meeting is already **the second UfM ministerial Conference this year**, and it is already **the fifth** after the resumption of UfM Conferences in 2013. These meetings at political level account for the new **political impulse** given to the UfM, as well as the new dynamics at **operational level** do, with a



growing number of projects entering the UfM pipeline for labelling and the development of the activity of the Secretariat of the UfM.

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will not hesitate to say that today's meeting **marks a milestone for the Mediterranean**. This UfM ministerial meeting is, as a matter of fact, the first specifically dedicated to the issue of climate change, and as such the first **Mediterranean** expression, at a political level, of our countries' and institutions' concern and commitment to face this major challenge.

More than one year ahead to next year's Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Climate Change Conference, to take place in Paris (COP21), today's Conference will undoubtedly appear to observers as an unprecedented contribution from the Mediterranean, as a whole, to address the challenge of climate change.

Allow me, as an introduction, to state and recall the obvious:

1- The Mediterranean is one of the most vulnerable regions to the consequences of global warming.

The region is to be highly affected by growing environmental and climate-related pressures to its natural resources. There is a wealth of scientific evidence to support this.



This pressure is all the more serious since it is taking place in the context of rapid urbanization in coastal areas, but also of water scarcity, loss of biodiversity, growing waste generation and increasing tourism and mobility.

We have to face it: in many countries, climate change impacts will **make it more difficult** to satisfy needs coming from the increase of economic activities, growing population levels, improved standard of living and increasing water needs per capita.

In this context, it is highly significant the fact of holding today's ministerial meeting.

2- Faced to the challenge of climate change, the need of a regional approach is not an option, it is an obligation

- This is increasingly the case in many fields of Mediterranean cooperation we are working on. But in the field of environmental policies, more than in any other else, there is no room for hesitation or delay on the need for a regional approach in support of national efforts to face this issue.

Regional cooperation is a condition to offer a sustainable and consistent answer to the many challenges we have to face. When it comes to environment and climate change, regional cooperation is a prerequisite for any reasonable long-term endeavor seeking efficient and sustainable solutions on the ground.



- **Hence the need to offer a comprehensive and coordinated regional response**, by fully taking into account the objectives and interests of all stakeholders.

3- The UfM stands today as an **operational platform** allowing to foster coordination efforts, by **drawing on the synergies and complementarities with and between governments, institutions, stakeholders and cooperation schemes in the region and aiming at identifying concrete regional projects and initiatives.**

This community, made up of a large variety of stakeholders and actors **is the key driving force** for action in the region. It already gathers around regional commitments – back from the Mediterranean Action plan and the Barcelona Convention of 1975 – and operates around a series of benchmark regional projects which keep on evolving in their nature and scale.

But efforts are necessarily being progressively streamlined, trying to maximize the potential for each stakeholder to reach its **optimal** contribution, whether this would be through knowledge, funding, networking, etc.

Regional cooperation is being reinforced because our actions are more coordinated. The attempt to progressively reduce fragmentation is indeed taking shape, and the UfM Secretariat is fully committed to ensure further progress in this respect.

In the aftermath of this Ministerial Meeting, the Secretariat, in close liaison with the UfM co-presidencies, is fully ready and



committed to activate, if you all approve it, the first Expert Group proposed in the draft declaration, which is to take place in September/October of this year. Governments have been asking for such group to meet at least once a year, and we will operationalize this decision **without delay** to progress and advance collaboration as a matter of urgency.

4- I would also like to mention the **UfM labeled projects to be developed on the ground and which will provide an additional powerful support to our joint efforts** for closer cooperation between Northern and Southern local stakeholders

The **de-pollution of the Mediterranean Sea** is of course one of the flagship initiatives of the Union for the Mediterranean. The objective has been advanced within the Euro-Mediterranean Horizon 2020 initiative, which continues to be **the cornerstone of all efforts**, with the **steady support of the European Commission** helping to make it a reality. I would like at this stage to underline the excellent collaboration we are developing with the European Commission.

In fact we see it much more than just a flagship initiative, but also as a key element for the improvement of **social and economic development** of the Mediterranean region.

This is why, in this framework, the UfM Secretariat is **advancing concrete projects on the ground** of regional significance. I will, as an example, mention the **“Depollution of the Lake Bizerte project”** which will allow implementing adequate infrastructure and sustainable methods of protection and prevention of all



sources of pollution, “hot spots”, that could affect the environmental quality of marine and coastal ecosystems and the quality of life in the region.

The pollution reduction in this region of Bizerte in Tunisia -highly affected by socio-economic difficulties- will improve health, allow new activities, and cooperation in the region. Involving public institutions, cities, industries and NGOs, builds an **integrated approach of exemplary nature** that will be shared and replicable in other countries through the H2020 initiatives.

Through and beyond the project, the UfM Secretariat will provide an additional component of **decentralized cooperation between Northern and Southern local stakeholders**, so as to share experience regarding environmental **management of Mediterranean coastal lakes** by local actors.

Let me also mention the UfM project **Med Recipe** (Mediterranean ReScp - Post Rio+20), labelled during the last SOM in April, on Promotion of the Adoption of Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns, in particular Resource Efficiency), which is, together with the EU funded SWITCH MED programme, an important step to the overall transition to green and low emissions economy.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to recall, in conclusion of these introductory remarks, that we are encountering in the field of environment and climate change, not only a major challenge but also, and maybe above all, **a major opportunity for preparing the future** of our Mediterranean region.

Long term sustainable **economic growth** also undoubtedly lies in the capacity of the region “to be one” on environmental issues. We **must build successes** in this field, continuing identifying **concrete steps and measures**, first and foremost **with Governments**, but also the **private sector** and all stakeholders in order to **step up** our regional cooperation efforts and get closer to tangible results.

Let’s have in mind the *cross-sectorial* aspects emerging from all our related UfM Ministerial Meetings and activities. Just a few weeks ago, the Declaration of the Ministerial Conference on **Industrial Cooperation**, that was held in Brussels on 19 February, identified **green industries** among the priority industrial sectors, in particular those where **SMEs** can provide maximum added value, with facilitation of business partnerships in sectors of shared interest, such as **agri-food, renewable energies, energy efficiency, and other fields linked to green growth**.

Let’s connect, follow-up and operationalize as much as possible on all those commitments and make today’s Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate change be a **milestone marking the reinforced cooperation**



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decided in 2014 by the countries of the Mediterranean on climate change at a regional level.

The UFM Secretariat stands by you in order to relentlessly move forward in this direction.

Thank you very much.