



Statement by Mr. Fathallah Sijilmassi
UfM Secretary-General
UfM Ministerial Meeting on Digital Economy
30 September 2014, Brussels

Dear Ministers,
Dear Vice-President and Commissioner for the digital agenda,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I would like first and foremost to express my gratitude and congratulations to **the UfM Co-Presidencies, Minister Sleit, and Commissioner Kroes** along with all EU institutions for convening such a timely high level encounter dealing with a strategic issue in the global economy and in the Euro Mediterranean region in particular

Allow me at the outset to congratulate Jordan for the renewal of its co presidency.

The principle of the co presidency is of paramount importance for the UfM as it materializes and operationalizes the fact that within the UfM the North and the South of the Mediterranean are together in full ownership defining and designing a common agenda.

And thank you Commissioner and your team for having taken enthusiastically this initiative to put this very important subject on the common agenda of the UfM.



- I would also like to warmly thank **the Italian EU Presidency**, for its very active commitment on Mediterranean issues during this semester. Today's Ministerial meeting is one among a large list of events foreseen during this semester.

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I. The importance of holding a UfM Ministerial Conference on Digital Economy

Let me briefly refer to 4 points that account for the importance of holding today's conference.

- First, **the cross-cutting dimension of Digital economy**: It is widely acknowledged that the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are a driving force in the modernization of both the private and public life, instrumental in driving economic growth and job creation.

To this regard, advancing the digital economy is actually advancing in many sectors at the same time.

- Second, because today's Conference does clearly showcase the **existence of a broad field of opportunities in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation**, opportunities stemming from the shared conviction on the need to advance on a growing number of areas, and thus paving the way for a broader, more consistent and self-reinforcing process based on a shared Euro-Mediterranean agenda.



- Third, because, as I have just said, **it builds on a shared Euro-Mediterranean agenda**. Advancing the Digital economy is a priority for the further development, integration and the sustainability of the economy, not only for the Southern Mediterranean region, but for the whole Euro-Mediterranean region.
- Fourth: in addition to all this, we must bear in mind one fact: **advancing the digital economy is advancing towards the goal of regional integration**, which stands in my opinion among the most crucial goals the region must pursue in the years to come. Today, the Southern Mediterranean region experiences very low levels of regional integration of their economies- intra-regional trade figures rank among the lowest in world terms- and this hampers economic growth, prosperity and ultimately people's wellbeing.

As such, it is generally agreed that regional cross-border business and society in general would greatly benefit if transactions - and the sharing of data and information between parties - could be carried out electronically in a secure environment.

II. ICT challenges and the role of the UfM Secretariat

Ministers, Commissioner, Ladies and Gentlemen, **ICT challenges in the Southern region are numerous**. They are related to infrastructure and capacity building, the role of regional cooperation and benchmarking, as well as the importance of the regulatory environment, transparency and universal services.



- The work of the Secretariat for the Union of the Mediterranean is to support projects for progress; projects and programs which promote regional integration, economic growth and employment, among many other objectives.

Promoting an open, competitive digital economy is a major step forward towards reaching these objectives.

This year the UFM Senior Official Meeting has labelled one important project related to the Digital Economy, **the Mobile Finance Project**. This project aims to support the expanded access to financial services across the population in the Mediterranean region, through the development of innovative retail payment solutions such as mobile financial services.

- The role of the Secretariat is also the one of being an **operational platform for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation**, aimed at fostering coordination efforts by **drawing on the synergies and complementarities** with and between governments, institutions, stakeholders and cooperation schemes in the region, and all that with a view of identifying concrete regional projects and initiatives.

III. Expected results of the Conference: follow-up

This is why I think that today's Conference should open new opportunities for meaningful cooperation in the region.

Following the expected outcomes of this Ministerial, the UfM Secretariat will build on the basis of your decisions.



- The Secretariat will welcome to actively participate in the **Expert Working Group on Euro-Mediterranean Digital Economy and Internet Access**.
- The Secretariat would also be prepared to intensify its involvement in the Digital Economy by **identifying, managing the process of labeling and developing regional projects with relevant stakeholders with all UfM Members** with the objective of promoting inclusive economic development and creating decent jobs particularly for SME, youth and women.

IV. Conclusion

The UfM Secretariat stands by you in order to ensure that political decisions, as the ones that will be taken today, do land on concrete and tangible projects and initiatives contributing to the socio-economic development of the whole Euro-Mediterranean region.

Thank you very much.