



Intervention at the first session (*New challenges for Mediterranean cooperation*) of the Conference NextMed: From ENPI to ENI: a New Phase of Cross-Border Cooperation: Achievements and New Challenges

By Fathallah Sijilmassi, Secretary General of the UfM

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Egregio Presidente Pigliaru, (*President of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia*)

Dear Mr. Della Vedova (*Benedetto Della Vedova, Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Italy*)

Dear Mr. Borg, (*Ian Borg, Parliamentary Secretary for the EU Presidency 2017 and EU Funds, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Malta*)

Dear Ambassador Busquets (*Gabriel Busquets, Ambassador at large for the Mediterranean, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Spain*)

Dear Ambassador Abdel Latif (*Nehad Abdel Latif, Ambassador, Former Assistant to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Former Chairman of the National Steering Bureau for the Implementation of Egypt-EU Partnership Agreement, Egypt*)

Dear Mr. Soru (*Renato Soru, Member of the European Parliament, President of the Committee for security policy and human rights. Delegation to the PA- UfM*)

Eccellenze,



Onorevoli colleghi,

Signore e Signori,

E' per me un onore essere presente oggi qui a Roma e partecipare alla Conferenza "NextMed" sponsorizzata dalla Presidenza Italiana del Consiglio dell'Unione Europea, dalla Commissione Europea e organizzata dalla Regione Autonoma della Sardegna.

I would like at the outset to thank the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union for sponsoring this event. The Italian Presidency has been a very active and successful presidency. We have been fortunate to hold many important Mediterranean-related events during this semester.

I would also like to seize this opportunity to thank the President of Sardinia Mr. Pigliaru, for inviting us today, giving full account of Sardinia's active involvement on Mediterranean issues and its growing interest in working with us.

I would also like to thank the Joint Managing Authority of the EU Cross Border Cooperation Programme for the Mediterranean Basin, and its Director General, Anna Catte. Following the fruitful contacts between our teams during these last months, I think we have managed to establish a well-structured working relationship that should yield very positive results for the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,



1. Challenges for Mediterranean cooperation

Let me begin by saying that today's Conference does provide a very illustrative lesson on how relevant actors and stakeholders in the region can work together.

I will explain you why.

The region does certainly face a complex context in the economic, political and social spheres.

I think that we can all share the view that the Mediterranean region has seen **unprecedented evolutions in recent years both at political and socio-economic spheres**. This push for change across the region has been partly- I would even say mainly- driven by socio-economic factors, for people's hope for a better future.

That's why I think that we will hardly find our way through if we do not strive to bring about **major socio-economic advances with real impact in citizen's lives**.

The **challenges are numerous**. And we are passing from abstract discourse to concrete action to tackle, for instance, youth unemployment- the Mediterranean region has one of the highest level of unemployment rates in the world, especially among young people and women, 30% of youth are jobless- , to concrete action to reach as well a more inclusive growth in terms of environment and Climate Change - the Mediterranean Sea, rich in biodiversity and natural resources, is one of the most



threatened seas in the world through both population or economic growth-, in terms of water consumption- 180 million people in the Mediterranean region are considered ‘water poor’- or in terms of women empowerment, for instance.

Be aware that I am not only referring to challenges faced by Southern Mediterranean countries: **I am actually pointing out to a number of challenges that are also shared by Northern Mediterranean countries.**

Now more than ever there is a **need for a joint response** to challenges that are shared by all.

I see a danger of avoiding – or at least postponing to “easier times” - dialogue, exchange of ideas and experiences, joint endeavors and common projects in favour of supposedly simpler national or bilateral solutions.

The regular holding of UfM ministerial conferences in the last two years has strongly contributed towards building a common Mediterranean agenda on a wide range of fields, notably women empowerment, transport, industrial cooperation, environment and climate change, and digital economy.

This showcases the shared commitment of all countries and stakeholders in the region to work on shared key topics and challenges; it also points to the existence of a **broad field of opportunities** in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation paving the



way for concrete and effective cooperation in a growing number of sectors.

Effective cooperation that allows to turn high-level decisions into concrete projects and initiatives, and to do it by drawing to the greatest extent on the synergies and complementarities among all relevant actors and stakeholders in the region, be it Member States, international organisations and institutions, financial institutions, civil society, private sector, etc.

There is certainly a shared conviction on the need **to ensure more coordination and greater synergies in the region.**

2. Cooperation Cross-Border Cooperation- UfM

The Programme on Cross Border Cooperation on the Mediterranean Basin and the UfM share, from their very name, this ambition and this responsibility of a Mediterranean Sea that promotes cooperation, prosperity and hope.

We have a **shared conviction and responsibility** of responding through regional and sub-regional action to the challenges we are facing.

We also **share the same approach and principles:**

- a focus on **initiatives responding to real needs** and having a concrete impact for the citizens in the region;
- the value of **ownership and lasting partnerships** between actors engaged in a topic or sector;



- the **commitment to seek flexible, tailor-made responses** that can serve as examples and pioneers on which to build large initiatives.

As we enter this new phase of cooperation between bringing together the Northern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean, we are all called upon to focus our action on the priorities which face women and men in the region.

But it is not only about the approach and the principles; **it is also about the priorities**: the common focus is striking, the priorities of CBC-Med and the mandate of the UFM:

Responding to unemployment, namely by fostering private sector growth, investing in human resources, promoting inclusive societies and encouraging a sustainable use of natural resources – the priorities in the region represent huge challenges and require us to work together. Synergy, partnerships and coordination are essential to deliver results.

Let me briefly refer in this regard to one of the key players in the region: **the private sector**, called to play a prominent role in fostering economic development in the region, and that should draw our attention. All data in the region show that SMEs account for 80 to 90 % of the companies in the countries. Surveys show also that the challenge of unemployment and mainly youth unemployment can only be addressed by growing employment capacities of the private sector. At the same time we know that there is an unanimous political will in all countries to give SMEs development a priority, as well as readiness for IFIs



and international organizations to deal with private sector development.

It is thus crucial to understand and address the developmental needs of the private sector as part of broader efforts to promote an inclusive development in the region. I would like to share with you that the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean is developing, as of 2014, **a strategy to further strengthen the relations with the private sector**, based on 5 pillars: a) informal dialogue and exchange of experiences with groups of private sector representatives (we already had a first meeting in October) b) organizing broader thematic platforms involving the private sector and dealing with specific issues (food security, energy, energy efficiency, smart cities, etc); c) specific activities within the framework of our initiative Med4Jobs, in which the private sector plays an important role mainly in pillar one “employability” and three “business coaching” of the initiative; d) encouraging the participation of the private sector in UFM initiatives and projects; e) engagement of the private sector in other processes developed within the framework of the UFM or other institutions so as to increase synergies and complementarities: UFM Ministerial meetings (trade, digital economy), the 5+5 Business Forum, the Agadir agreement, OECD, ETF, World Bank, etc.



Let me finish by recalling that the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean already works in a structural, continuous partnership with the European Commission, as UfM Co-President along with Jordan, as well as strategic supporter, also on reflecting on how to promote coordination of all actors working in the region.

This is why – under the new cycle that is being launched - I call for a close collaboration between CBC Med (and its Joint Managing Authority) and the Secretariat of the UfM, each in line with its mandate and safeguarding its processes, to be more effective in our action, work together on joint initiatives, promote new ideas and responses, capitalize on the good work already achieved in our region.

Thank you very much.