



NEWSLETTER

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UfM Member States exchange views on current challenges and advance cooperation in the region

- The Jordanian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nasser Judeh, opened the Senior Officials Meeting in Jordan, which has held the southern co-presidency of the UfM since 2012.
- Within the political dialogue, Senior Officials exchanged views on the Middle East Peace Process, the situation in Syria and its repercussions on the ground, including the Syrian refugees issue and the phenomena of extremism and radicalism across the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The Senior Officials of the Union for the Mediterranean met on Sunday 24 May for the second time this year. The meeting, opened in Amman by Nasser Judeh, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, was very significant and symbolic as it was the first time

that it had been held in a southern Mediterranean country. The next meeting will be on 27 October in Luxembourg, the upcoming President of the EU Council.

Minister Judeh discussed recent developments in the Middle

East, the situation in Syria and its repercussions on the ground, including the Syrian refugees issue and its adverse impact on the Jordanian economy.

He also exchanged views with the Member States representatives





regarding the growing phenomena of extremism and radicalism, and highlighted the need to fight these phenomena globally and collectively through a comprehensive approach. The European Neighbourhood Policy review process following the informal Ministerial Conference, which took place in Barcelona on 13 April at the headquarters of the UfM Secretariat, was also discussed during the meeting in Jordan.

Furthermore, three new projects were labelled, namely the Bouregreg Valley Development project in the field of urban development, the CEED Growing and Scaling Small and Medium-Sized Businesses and Femmes d'Avenir in the field of Women Empowerment (see below for more information).

The Senior Officials underlined the importance of Blue Economy-related issues and referred to the upcoming

Ad Hoc SOM on 28 May held back-to-back with the UfM stakeholders meeting [“Towards a Roadmap for Blue Investment and Jobs in the Mediterranean”](#) in Athens on 27 May as preparation for the UfM Ministerial Conference on the Blue Economy.

Representatives from the Member States were briefed on Mediterranean Climate Week and [the informal UfM High-Level Conference](#) held in Skhirat, Morocco, last 7 May. The Secretary General of the UfM, Fathallah Sijilmassi, also debriefed the Senior Officials on the three back-to-back meetings (ad-hoc SOM on strengthening the role of women in society, the conclusions of the multi-stakeholder meeting and the [High-Level Conference on Fostering Women's Participation in Economic Life](#)) that took place in Barcelona on 19-21 May.

LABELLED PROJECTS

• Bouregreg Valley Development

The project aims to develop new neighbourhoods for professional and residential use to achieve social diversity as well as public amenities and spaces. It will preserve cultivated land, create natural ecological spaces, undertake reforestation actions and restore watercourses that present a risk of gully erosion and landslides. It will also promote an integrated development that meets the area's present and future needs, including landmark facilities that benefit the entire metropolitan area such as a hospital and the refurbishment of Chellah. Moreover, the project will provide urban continuity between the two towns by improving road

infrastructure, links and traffic flow between the cities of Rabat and Salé.

• CEED Growing and Scaling Small and Medium-Sized Businesses

It is designed to enhance the leadership, management and entrepreneurial skills of 300 small and medium-sized businesses and women entrepreneurs, diminish the human capital gap, increase the number of women entrepreneurs and managers who own/manage SMEs and scale companies in order to increase the number of jobs created and contribute to the national economies of the region. The regional objective is to form cross-border linkages between entrepreneurs in the Mediterranean which is paramount in growing the economies in the region, facilitate a

regional approach for investment, give the opportunity to entrepreneurs to lead new cross-border solutions and help entrepreneurs and their companies find cross-border opportunities.

• Femmes d'Avenir

The project aims to help young women with their professional careers, enhance their ability to access positions of responsibility and develop their involvement in favour of gender equality. It also seeks to disseminate gender equality culture by working with a women's network engaged in promoting equality in their respective countries and activity fields. Femmes d'Avenir is in line with the UfM Ministerial commitments on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society.

250 experts gathered in the UfM Conference to foster women's participation in the economic life

- 250 policymakers, experts, representatives from international organisations, think tanks, funding agencies, private sector and civil society from 35 countries discussed solutions to reduce the economic gender gap in the Euro-Mediterranean region. They stressed the urgency to improve women's economic participation and called for concrete measures and more synergy between key actors in the region.
- The Minister of Women and Family Affairs of Tunisia, Samira Merai Friia, proposed that Tunisia hosts the next Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial Conference on increasing the role of women in Society in 2016.



The Union for the Mediterranean organised in Barcelona the second international Conference on Women's Participation in Economic life on 21 May. Opened by the Minister of Women and Family Affairs of Tunisia, Ms. Samira Merai Friia, and closed by the President of the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, Ms. Elisabeth Guigou, together with M. Fathallah Sijilmassi, Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean, the conference brought together more than 250 experts and policymakers, international and national organizations, donors and banks, civil society and project promoters, to discuss and explore the best ways to promote women

empowerment and reduce the gender gap in economic participation of women in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Over the 3 days, participants debated on how to overcome the main obstacles that hinder the full economic participation of women, and the solutions to reinforce synergies and coordination between actors across the region. They shared experiences and best practices and made recommendations on how to concretely promote inclusive growth and gender equality in the region. These include relevant public policies, regulatory mechanisms and an enabling environment to fully

implement all women rights, combat violence and discriminations and foster equal economic participation. Some tools and mechanisms were identified by participants such as the "Gender sensitive budgeting", improved access to finance, education and training programmes, increased availability of gender sensitive data and indicators.

Three thematic workshops allowed participants to elaborate recommendations for increasing employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women in innovative sectors such as social and solidarity economy; "green economy" and ICT. A fourth workshop highlighted the key role that can be played by Media to improve the image of women's role in economy.

The Secretary General Mr. Fathallah Sijilmassi confirmed *"the Union for the Mediterranean's commitment to maintain gender equality as a priority going forward". "Gender equality is a regional matter, and calls for a regional response. We all have the duty to act, and to act efficiently".*

"Increasing the role of women in the

society is a question of human rights, a question of social and economic inclusive development, and a question of stability and security" said Delphine Borione, Deputy Secretary General for Social and Civil Affairs in the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean.

The Conference was the occasion to launch the first "Regional Dialogue on women empowerment" involving UfM countries and regional and international stakeholders, including civil society organisations of the region to concretely work on

the implementation of the Paris Ministerial commitments, in the field of participation of women in economic life, combat against violence, women leadership and change of stereotypes. During the Conference, the UfM presented several concrete projects and initiatives. Two projects were officially launched: "Developing Women Empowerment" promoted by the "Euro Mediterranean Women Fondation" and "Forming Responsible Citizens" promoted by Ideaborn.

Up to May 2015, the Secretariat is mobilizing over 1,000 key

stakeholders through the UfM regional platform. It has developed 10 projects exclusively focusing on women empowerment or integrating a strong gender component, reaching 50,000 beneficiaries from 20 countries. One of the beneficiary of a UFM project "Young women as job creators", Ms. Soukeina El Bouj, highlighted : *"This project gave us the chance to think as a professional business developer, not as a university student. We put our first step on the right track thanks to the opportunity of being in touch with professional women who have their own companies now"* she said.

Improving quality of life in the MENA region through integrated water management

- The launch of the Water Integrity Capacity Building Programme for the Middle East and North Africa embodies the Union for the Mediterranean's commitment to improving quality of life in the region through the implementation of integrated, equitable and sustainable water resources management.

The UfM-labelled project 'Water Integrity Capacity Building Programme for the Middle East and North Africa' was officially launched on 12 May in Sharm El-Sheikh (Egypt) during the IUCN-ROWA regional conference "Water and Nature Knowledge Sharing Forum", with the participation of the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean.

The project, promoted by [Stockholm International Water Institute \(SIWI\)](#), targets a broad range of beneficiaries, including water officials involved in regulation, controlling and planning; mid-level water managers; farmers' organisations, water user associations, the media, students, women's groups and other civil society actors in Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Morocco and Tunisia, with the potential

to expand it to more countries in the future. Direct beneficiaries will also include the national partners, universities, and research centres, which will be equipped with state-of-the-art knowledge on water integrity and the skills to include modules of water integrity in their curricula. Through stakeholder engagement, assessment of water integrity risks and the implementation of the capacity building programme, the project aims to strengthen dialogue and advocacy at regional level on how integrity, transparency, accountability and corruption can be addressed in water resource management, drawing on experiences at basin-level, country-level and local level for new and suitable approaches.

More specifically, it aims to raise

awareness and foster high-level political dialogue at inter-governmental level on water integrity, increase knowledge at national level about tools to improve the flow of information and communication channels between decision-makers, enhance skills among mid-level water managers and professionals and increase the capacity of civil society to demand transparency and accountability in the management of water resources and services.

In line with UfM's priorities, the overall objective of the project is to contribute to ensuring that people in the MENA region enjoy a better quality of life through the implementation of integrated, equitable and sustainable water resources management.



Financed by the [Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency \(Sida\)](#) and the [International Union for Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\)](#), the project's partners include [Global Water Partnership – Mediterranean \(GWP-Med\)](#), [Arab Integrated Water Resources Management Network \(AWARENET\)](#), [International Union for](#)

[Conservation of Nature – Regional Office of West Asia \(IUCN-ROWA\)](#), as well as several universities, institutes and research centres in the participating countries. Throughout the inception period, the UfM Secretariat worked with the [Stockholm International Water Institute \(SIWI\)](#) to broaden project activities, introduced a new implementation partner, secured additional support from line ministries, and ensured this project was labelled in time for the announcement of the first regional training event in Tunis, in December 2014.

The UfM Secretariat has been actively engaged in a series of events and activities in the fields of Water, Environment and Climate Change. In this respect, the UfM Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Change (Athens, May 2014) marked a strong political expression of the UfM countries' commitment in the field of environmental protection, resource efficiency and climate change, which

is being addressed at the UfM in close connection with other major regional challenges, such as water scarcity, energy, food security, overpopulation and resilience to extreme weather events.

In line with the priorities set by the Ministerial Meeting, and within the framework of the Mediterranean Climate Week organised by Morocco, a [UfM Informal High-Level Conference on Climate Change](#) took place in Morocco (8 May) with the aim of contributing to regional and national efforts to prepare climate change goals in the Mediterranean, while the [“Private Sector Forum on Food Security in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Region”](#) hosted by the UfM Secretariat (5-6 May) aimed at boosting sustainable agricultural production and trade as one of the main priorities for the southern and eastern rim of the Mediterranean, where most countries produce insufficient quantities of staple foods.

Promoting sustainable urban development in the Mediterranean region – launching of the second phase of the Urban Projects Finance Initiative

- The Urban Projects Finance Initiative (UPFI) workshop brought together for the first time all relevant stakeholders and promoters involved in this initiative, marking the start of its second phase.
- The Minister of State for Urban Renewal and Informal Areas of Egypt, Laila Iskandar, the Secretary of State for Housing of the Government of Tunisia, Anis Ghdira, and the mayor of Jericho (Palestine), Mohammed Jalayta, attended the workshop, which gathered 60 participants of 15 UPFI projects from 6 countries.

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) held on 9-10 June the Urban Projects Finance Initiative (UPFI) Workshop at its headquarters in Barcelona.

The meeting brought together for the first time all actors involved in the UPFI process- namely project promoters, financial partners and consultant teams-, marking the start

of the second phase of the initiative.

UPFI's purpose is to identify and select sustainable and innovative urban development projects that offer bottom-



up, regionally replicable solutions to the major urban development challenges facing the region.

While the first phase of the initiative focused on the selection of the projects and the definition of the Technical Assistance needed, the second phase will consist on the implementation of the identified Technical Assistance programmes with a view to ensuring the projects' bankability by International Finance Institutions.

The workshop gathered major urban planning players such as the Minister for Urban Renewal and Informal Areas of Egypt, Laila Iskandar; the Secretary of State for Housing of the Government of Tunisia, Anis Ghdira and the mayor of Jericho (Palestine), Mohammed Jalayta. Among the 60 participants, there were as well representatives of 15 UPFI projects from 6 countries, namely Bouregreg-Rabat Salé, Tétouan, Benguerir and Agadir (Morocco); Gabes, Sfax-Taparura and Médinas (Tunisia); Imbaba-Giza and Esna (Egypt); Nablus, Bethlehem and Jericho (Palestine); Lod (Israel); and the Il Project of local and regional development (Jordan), attended the one-day meeting.

"The UfM Secretariat plays a role of 'trust third party' amongst different countries for the exchange of information and the projects implementation to be assured and for the cooperation logics to prevail because this is what makes the action of each partner more efficient and visible", said Secretary General

Fathallah Sijilmassi. *"The Urban Project Finance Initiative (UPFI) can be an example for other fields in which regional cooperation represents a real added value", added Sijilmassi.*

UPFI is one of the pillars of the Euro-Mediterranean Sustainable Urban Development Strategy, as stated in the declaration of the [First Ministerial Conference of the UfM on Sustainable Urban Development](#), held in Strasbourg on 10 November 2011. The initiative was launched during the [Senior Officials Meeting on 7 April 2014](#), and received the endorsement of the representatives of the 43 UfM member countries. Three projects have already been labelled by the UfM under the framework of this initiative: the Imbaba Upgrading Project, the Sfax Taparura project and the Bouregreg Valley Development.

UPFI is managed by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB) with the support of the European Commission and under the umbrella of the UfM Secretariat. The KfW Development Bank, the Caisse des Dépôts (CDC), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and the Finnish Cooperation are closely associated, whilst other IFI's and investors have expressed their interest.

The holding of this workshop, gathering all relevant Euro-Mediterranean institutions and stakeholders operating in the field

of sustainable urban development, gives evidence of the role of the UfM Secretariat as an operational platform to foster coordination efforts, by drawing on the synergies with and between institutions, stakeholders, cooperation schemes and donors.

LABELLED PROJECTS

• Imbaba Upgrading Urban Project

The main objective of this project is to strengthen the integration of Imbaba, one of the most populated and unplanned urban areas of Egypt, with the city of Cairo by providing its 700,000 inhabitants with the basic facilities, infrastructure and services which are currently lacking.

• Sfax – Taparura

Sfax is a coastal city open to the Mediterranean. It is the second biggest city of Tunisia and the most important industrial and commercial centre in the south of the country. Site of the phosphate industry, it has suffered from significant pollution which has hampered its development. After the depollution of the northern coast of the city, the project foresees the rehabilitation of its beaches and the creation of 420 hectares of land to extend the metropolitan area.

• Bouregreg Valley Development

The project aims to develop new neighbourhoods for professional and residential use (to achieve social diversity), as well as public amenities and spaces. It will preserve cultivated land, create natural ecological spaces, undertake reforestation actions and restore water courses that present a risk of gully erosion and landslides. It will also promote an integrated development meeting the area's present and future needs, including landmark facilities that benefit the entire metropolitan such as a hospital and the rehabilitation of Chellah.

UFM, FAO and EBRD seek to boost food security in the Mediterranean region

- Unleashing public and private investment to enhance agricultural production and improve food security is essential for the southern and eastern Mediterranean region.



Boosting sustainable agricultural production and trade is one of the main priorities for the southern and eastern rims of the Mediterranean, where most countries produce insufficient quantities of food staples. For this reason, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) co-organised the “[Private Sector Forum on Food Security in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Region](#)”, a two-day conference (5-6 May) in Barcelona, to deepen relationships between the public and private sector – from farmers and their organisations to small, medium and large agribusiness enterprises – and to develop initiatives to increase investment in agricultural and food systems.

Opened by the Mayor of Barcelona, Xavier Trias, the Secretary General at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Environment in Spain, Carlos Cabanas Godino, and the Catalan Conseller for Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, Food and Natural Environment, Josep Maria Pelegrí, the Forum has gathered high-level policy-makers, financial institutions and representatives from the private sector, research centres and academia. The Forum offers the opportunity to discuss how the public and private sectors can collaborate to bolster food security in the region by enabling sustainable private investment in a region characterised by population growth, natural-resource constraints and a structural deficit in the production of staple food.

Trade flows are growing

The countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean region import

half of their basic crops. Imports of agricultural food products to the region have risen by US\$ 69 billion, or 63 per cent, between 2002 and 2013. Meanwhile, exports have risen fivefold since 2000, to US\$31 billion, including dramatic increases in fruit and vegetable shipments to the Middle East and North African markets.

In 2013 the region imported 29 million tonnes of wheat. It is increasingly dependent on imports for key staples such as grains, sugar and vegetable oil, which supply the majority of calories consumed. Furthermore, moving grain from port to mill can cost up to four times more than the global standard, due to slow turnaround times for vessels, storage costs, and high product losses.

This high demand for basic food products is mainly due to rapid population growth in a region which has limited and fragile natural resources – in particular, land and water – and an acute vulnerability to climate change. The region also suffers from under-investment in agriculture and insufficient private sector participation.

During the two-day Forum, participants will examine ways to tackle these challenges. Discussions will focus on how to boost local production of fruit and vegetables for export; further diversify import suppliers and export markets; enhance

procurement policies supplemented by well-designed strategic-reserve policies; better structure food value chains; increase investment in research and development; and make import processes cheaper. Furthermore, stronger regional integration of agricultural markets would help countries cope with supply shocks and would mitigate changes in food prices.

At the Forum, EBRD Vice President Philippe le Houérou noted: "In recent years, food security has become one of the EBRD's priorities. A dynamic, competitive and inclusive agribusiness industry, driven by private sector participation, can be a powerful force to promote food security. In the next three years, the EBRD aims to invest over €300 million in the region's agribusinesses, from SMEs and family farms to larger agro-processing companies, to reinforce the private sector role in enhancing food security. We are also combining our efforts to put in place policies that encourage investment, to build more efficient import value chains, and to encourage more inter- and intra-regional trade, which will help achieve this potential."

Southern and eastern Mediterranean countries could shift from a model in which they seek to meet all of their own food needs, to an agricultural self-reliance model based on using comparative advantages. Under this model, export earnings generated by food products appropriate to the region are used to purchase imports of food goods that are not suited for local production.

Making the most of valuable water

While the Mediterranean region is an ancient agricultural heartland, it faces growing constraints on natural resources. Its population on the Southern and Eastern rim is expected

to grow significantly, reaching 360 million by 2030. At the same time, climate-change forecasts suggest that precipitation levels in the region could decline by 10 to 40 per cent by 2050.

"To become as efficient as possible, investments in the agricultural sector must make the best use of scarce natural resources in the region. For example, every drop of water has to be used with extreme care and to generate the highest possible value," said Laurent Thomas, FAO Assistant Director-General for Technical Cooperation.

He further noted: *"FAO is active in providing policy and technical advice to member countries dealing with water scarcity as a corporate priority for the region, and I praise all actors investing in water-saving technologies. Other FAO priorities for the region include building resilience for food security and nutrition and supporting small-scale agriculture for inclusive development."*

A forthcoming FAO analysis will show that natural-resource constraints support the region's comparative advantage in growing higher-value crops such as olives and other fruit and vegetables. Higher export levels of products in which the region enjoys a comparative advantage would also help cushion the effects of potential global food-price inflation such as the increases that shook much of the region in 2008.

Mobilising all private players, mapping priority initiatives

Although agriculture in the region is increasingly dynamic, it is also characterised by a myriad of smallholders and small rural enterprises. This profile poses a particular challenge for policy-makers.

"Youth employment is a burning issue in the region. We see agriculture as part

of the solution because it can generate sustainable sources of income and jobs in rural areas", said UfM Secretary-General Fathallah Sijilmassi. *"Small producers and enterprises should be properly included in agricultural food chains".* He also noted that this Forum falls within the UfM strategy for private-sector development as a driving force to foster regional integration in the Mediterranean region.

As experience shows, agricultural economic growth is most effective when it is inclusive, allowing smallholders access to credit and market opportunities. Participants explored the role that cooperatives can play in procuring key inputs, and agreed that the domestic private sector can bring an array of innovative solutions to the region's food security equation.

To help realise that potential, FAO, the EBRD and the UfM have reiterated their willingness to ensure that the voices of the private-sector and farmers' organisations are heard in policy forums at regional and national levels.

Complementing the EBRD's promise of investment, the institutions are committed to mobilising technical assistance that can support policy platforms. These platforms would consider issues such as Egypt's grain import infrastructure, Tunisia's olive oil sector, Morocco's horticultural sector, the role of cooperatives, as well as water-efficient technologies and agricultural practices across the region.

The private sector as a driving force for regional integration

- The EU Commissioner for the European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement, Johannes Hahn, the former Prime Minister of Tunisia, Mehdi Jomaa and the UfM Secretary General, Fathallah Sijilmassi, reiterate the importance of fostering cooperation between private sector, International financial institutions and regional organisations.



regional dynamic and to associate more closely private sector with UfM activities and also to identify how UfM can support private sector ideas and initiatives".

Commissioner Hahn stated: "A flourishing economy across the Mediterranean is key to reach our shared objectives of stability and prosperity and for that the private sector must be at the core of any successful process". He also highlighted the important role played by the Union for the Mediterranean in promoting private sector-led growth and employment in the Southern Partners.

Former Prime Minister from Tunisia stressed that "private sector needs to open the door to young unemployed people. We cannot tackle unemployment without the private sector".

This meeting is part of an ongoing process in the framework of the UfM strategy for the private sector development, launched at the end of last year, and that has initiated the first regional dynamic with the private sector. As first steps of this strategy, the Secretariat organized last year two working meetings to engage private sector players in addressing the region's challenges through consultations and discussions with international financial institutions (IFIs), private companies, international and regional organisations as well as civil society representatives. The

The Union for the Mediterranean organised together with the European Commission a two-day High-level Meeting on the role of the private sector in strengthening the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership beginning 14 April 2015 in Barcelona.

The meeting, which gathered more than 100 representatives from the private sector, international and regional organisations and International Financial Institutions (IFIs), took place, immediately after the informal Ministerial Conference held at Palau de Pedralbes, headquarters of the UfM, to discuss the future of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). **The revision of the ENP provides an opportunity to emphasize the need for strengthening the role of the private sector and improving the business environment across the region.**

Discussions aimed at fostering

dialogue between stakeholders from the private sector and main financial institutions on key strategic issues for the future of the region: **inclusive growth and job creation, Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) and informal economy.** According to a survey by the European Investment Bank: in 2013, major financial institutions have committed more than 1.5 billion euros for the private sector in the region and the estimation of infrastructure investment needs for 2020 for southern Mediterranean countries are of the order of € 23 billion per year, or a total of \$ 160 billion over 7 years; in addition, data from the World Bank show that the informal economy could represent over 65% of employment in Southern Mediterranean countries.

At the opening speech at the Caixa Forum in Barcelona, Secretary General Sijilmassi said to participants that this meeting "will allow continuing the

three key strategic issues discussed during the meeting were raised by the participants on those occasions.

The meeting also served to identify other priority issues for the development of the private sector in the region: access to finance, labour rights and social responsibility, which

could be addressed in future meetings in the framework of this strategy. The UfM foresees as well the organization this year of two other High-level private sector meetings on food security (5/6 May 2015) and energy (second semester).

Private sector development is key to

seizing existing business opportunities and fostering regional integration in the Mediterranean by raising the current levels of intra-regional trade, only 5% of total external trade, low compared to 65% among EU countries, 22% of ASEAN countries and 19% of MERCOSUR countries.

FEATURED INTERVIEW

UfM interviews Mohammad Naciri

Mr. Naciri is the Regional Director of the Arab States Regional Office of UN Women



UfM: What are the biggest challenges regarding women's empowerment in the region?

Mohammad Naciri (M.N.): It's a very long list, unfortunately, as it is one of the most unstable regions in the world. In addition to the current conflicts, wars and terrorism, women from the region are also suffering from political and economic marginalisation as well as from physical violence.

UfM: How do you think UN Women and the UfM, as international

organisations, are specially equipped to address these challenges?

M.N.: We are trying to be as agile as the situation requires, as it is constantly changing and evolving. From UN Women's side, we are including a new component to our Peace and Security strategy to deal with violent extremism. Through our partnership with the UfM, we are working to promote women's economic empowerment and higher participation of women in Politics as well as to combat violence and the stereotyping of women in media. These are some of the root causes for women's marginalisation.

Furthermore, we recently had a meeting with all the UfM member state's Senior Officials and discussed very concrete steps to follow-up on the Beijing platform for action and the post 2015 agenda, so definitely the advocacy and the political work of the UfM to advance the agenda after 2015 will be key.

UfM: What is the added value that the UfM Secretariat can specifically bring to the work that UN Women is currently undertaking?

M.N.: As its own name implies, the Union for the Mediterranean includes a combination of European, North African and Middle Eastern countries, where political and economic support can be obtained and actions implemented at regional level. Furthermore, the UfM has been working very actively over the past few years on the gender equality agenda.

Last year we signed a memorandum of understanding of strategic importance for the simple fact that there are so many issues to tackle that it will be quite impossible for any of us to work alone on the developmental agenda in the next future. It is then very important to create partnerships, not only to implement specific actions on the ground but also to secure political support at the regional level.