

Cooperating to address the challenges of energy and climate in the Mediterranean region



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The new Sustainable Development Goals of United Nations and the Paris Agreement adopted during the CoP 21 have placed energy at the core of all major challenges, but also of promising opportunities. As it has been said by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, “*energy is the golden thread that connects economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability*”. Whether we talk on employment, security, climate change, food production or economic growth, universal access to energy is essential. Indeed, we cannot conceive today fostering sustainable development without energy access.

The Mediterranean region is facing a crucial period for its development, highly conditioned upon its capacity to mobilize important investments. Regional cooperation among Mediterranean countries is essential nowadays to face the existing common challenges and to make the most of the opportunities that this region offers. The areas for cooperation are immensely diverse. In the current international context, cooperation in the energy field is not just an option, but a need, and potentially an opportunity for both shores of the Mediterranean to foster their economic and social development in accordance to sustainability criteria.

While oil and gas still remain the main sources of energy today, renewable energies

and energy efficiency offer a unique opportunity for countries to reduce their vulnerability in terms of energy security –which is at the top of the international political agenda-, building climate resilience in our societies and fostering the transition to new sustainable development models. The deployment of renewables as well as of energy efficiency measures represent a number of

benefits for net importer countries as well as for net exporter ones, including technological transfers, skilled jobs and potential for attracting private investment. This is not to mention the direct impact on the reduction of disruption risks due to economic, technical or political instabilities and of the dependency on oil markets.



Tafila Wind Farm

Energy security and stability in the region are two key issues, closely interlinked. The urgency to address climate change effects and its close connection with other vulnerabilities in the region, namely water scarcity, food security, urban development and resilience to extreme weather events, have further accentuated the need of tackling energy issues from a regional and comprehensive approach.

In this context, the Union for the Mediterranean, intergovernmental organization born in 2008, provides a privileged forum to strengthen the cooperation in the Mediterranean region, with the support of its 43 Member States and a number of relevant stakeholders. Through its Secretariat based in Barcelona, Spain, the Union for the Mediterranean acts as a unique platform to facilitate and promote regional dialogue and cooperation as well as to identify, support and implement concrete regional projects with the ultimate goal of fostering the integration and the social and economic development of the Mediterranean region.

The elements on the ground that allow and activate this so essential cooperation are mainly the geographical proximity, the existing complementarities among the countries of the Union for the Mediterranean, the common challenges to be faced and the economic interdependencies between the two rims of the Mediterranean Sea. The improvement of cooperation provides a high added value to economies since it reduces investment costs; it gives markets the critical size to scale up investments and it represents an opportunity

for the region to become more an active player in the new economic paradigm.

It is therefore clear that the comprehensive approach needed can only be developed through a structured dialogue among all the relevant actors in the region, allowing the exchange of experiences and the identification of concrete initiatives to achieve common goals, while creating synergies among a complex system of various structures and programs and reinforcing strategic partnerships with other international and regional institutions that share the same objectives.

While respecting the principles of inclusiveness and variable geometry, the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean has been able to progress on the identification of regional priorities and lines of action, focusing on those common concerns where regional cooperation can have an added value. Advancing towards the energy markets' integration, supporting local authorities' efforts for building low carbon and resilient societies and mobilising private sector for innovative actions in these fields are some of the main priorities that are shaping the Mediterranean Agenda of Solutions. In parallel, an important effort is being carried out to adapt existing financial instruments to these core concerns, while creating the conditions to allow these investments to have a clear impact in terms of employment, particularly for the youth.

The UfM Secretariat is already contributing to the common efforts in combating the adverse effects of climate change with 14 projects endorsed by the 43 UfM Member

States for a total value of more than €4 billion. The MEDCOP of Tangiers, and particularly the COP 22 to be held in Marrakech in November this year, will be excellent opportunities to highlight the added value of the regional dimension, that can play a vital role to better link the international framework with the national strategies of our Member States.

The international agenda will continue to be shaped over the coming years by the need of advancing towards more secure and sustainable energy models in the region, concerning both demand and supply. The challenges ahead of us require common approaches, clear strategies, and policy goals translated into a set of articulated, sequenced and integrated actions. Only by cooperating and uniting efforts, successful results will be achieved. Remaining aloof is not an option anymore.

Tafila Wind Farm (in Jordan) is one of the regional projects on renewable energy labelled by the Union for the Mediterranean

