



3<sup>rd</sup> UfM Ministerial on Employment and Labour

27 September 2016, Dead Sea - Jordan

Dear Co-Presidents,

Mr. Ali al-Ghazzawi, Minister of Labor of Jordan,

Ms. Marianne Thyssen, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility,

Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here in Jordan today on the occasion of this 3<sup>rd</sup> ministerial conference dealing with Employment and labour issues in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Let me, at the very outset, Minister, express my personal gratitude to Jordan, our host country for the hospitality and the perfect organization of this conference and more broadly, I would like to pay tribute for Jordan's commitment for development, peace and stability in our region.

I would like to thank also the European Union - Commissioner Thyssen, for the strong support and leadership in the UfM activities.

As with all UfM fields of activity, the leadership of the co-presidency has proven instrumental to advance our work and enhance regional cooperation efforts. As you know, 8 Ministerial meetings have taken place



in the course of the last years on other key areas of activity and several new ministerial meetings are foreseen in the coming months.

Today's ministerial meeting comes timely to examine together the strategic and operational way forward to strengthen regional cooperation on employment and labour, in the light of the so many challenges we are currently facing.

I want to pay tribute to the excellent work done by the UfM High Level Working Group on employment, and to thank the Member States and the *DG employment and social affairs* for their continuous commitment. Thanks to the efforts of all, the work conducted over the last years within the **UfM framework action plan on employment** has proven useful to promote effective and innovative initiatives that support job creation in formal economy. I also value the exchange which took place with the Euro-Mediterranean Social Partners and Social Partners recommendations.

The **ministerial declaration to be** adopted today will generate a further comprehensive set of action. This is an **important collective achievement**.

Allow me to rapidly share with you a few general reflections:

**1/** As we all know, **Human development** is the key issue for **stability and security** in the Mediterranean.

And, more specifically, **Youth employability** is at the very heart of all current pressing challenges, be they economic growth, social cohesion, migration challenges, or efforts to counter radicalization and violence.

The importance of creating more productive and decent jobs that can absorb the annually increasing entrants into the labour markets,



especially young people and women, is instrumental for the future of all our countries.

The Mediterranean region retains one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world. An issue common to **North and South**, with at least six **Northern** Mediterranean countries having youth unemployment rates exceeding even 30 per cent.

Mediterranean countries are experiencing a very rapid growth in their working age populations, a high percentage of job-seekers ending up in the informal economy. 2.8 million young people enter the labour market each year in the region!! The overall situation is therefore critical, and I will not enter into the specific situation of a country like Jordan, which hosts us today, which faces a huge influx of refugees and migrants putting unbearable additional strain on its labour market.

Abstract figures and numbers on youth unemployment in the Mediterranean hardly give the full dimension of the hardship and individual struggles by **millions of young men and women** in their so difficult transition from education-to-work.

It is by the way the first time that the international community has come together to address specifically the question of **Youth** with the adoption of the **Security Council Resolution 2250** (Jordan has been one of its stronger supporter, as for the Declaration for Refugees and Migrants adopted at the General Assembly). The UfM will partner in this regard with the UN Secretary-General's **Special Envoy on Youth Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi** of Jordan. I met him last week to this end, to discuss concrete actions for Youth in the Mediterranean.

**2/ The low level of regional economic integration** in the Mediterranean is a serious handicap, whereas the potential for an increased integration



is **huge** and would bring significant benefits for the whole region. The strength and competitiveness of our region and overall increased labour demand will of course come from a more conducive business climate (notably for MSMEs so that they can formalize and potentially grow), and from an increase in investment, research and trade flows.

In this context, regional cooperation has a strong potential to facilitate this evolution, as it allows to exchange, promote, replicate and upscale best practices and accompany at regional level the efforts by the Member States.

The UfM has developed to this end a growing activity and a specific methodology which has yielded concrete positive results and given new momentum to the regional cooperation framework.

The Secretariat has been actively engaged in the last years in the consultations with the Member States and partners to put in place the operational action plan aiming at improving employment situation in the region through the development of regional projects in priority areas and fostering a UfM employment dialogue platform.

In coherence and full implementation of the UN **Sustainable Development Goals**, it will **further amplify** its action to operationalize the decisions you are taking today at political level. The **multi-partner approach** developed by the Secretariat is indeed helping to put in action our objectives, through the exchange of best practices, sharing of experiences, identifying new and innovative methodologies and developing regional and sub-regional networks.

As you know, UfM activities have already reached a first level of direct tangible impact with a potential of growing further, in particular on Youth employability, inclusive growth and women empowerment: **25** projects, with impact on close to **200,000** individuals; out of which the UfM “**Med4Jobs**



**initiative”** has currently 12 projects running on the Southern and Northern shores of the Mediterranean, targeting over 100,000 young beneficiaries and supporting the development of over 1000 SMEs.

Med4Jobs was developed with member States, with the European Commission as well as universities, financial institutions, private sector and NGOs. Its integrated approach tackles the supply and demand sides of the labour market as well as the matching between both of them. It operates simultaneously on two dimensions: by establishing a regional platform for dialogue and by promoting and replicating visible private sector job-creation projects in the Mediterranean region.

On the demand-side, the UfM and its partners work to set up mechanisms supporting the development of SMEs, such as incubators and coaching programmes. The Mediterranean Entrepreneurship Network-project, which provides mentoring and finance to new businesses of successful entrepreneurs, is one example.

On the supply-side, the Secretariat works on to increase young people's employability, with specific attention for women empowerment, illustrated by our Skills for Success project. This project provides disadvantaged, unemployed, secondary-level women with the skills and knowledge to enter the labour market.

On the job intermediation and miss-match between both Sides, a new project “YouMatch tool-box”, has recently been launched in cooperation with Germany (GIZ, with the support of BMZ), to assess existing employment services and enable peer to peer learning and knowledge sharing.



### 3/ Ministers, Excellencies,

**Inclusive** growth, through Employment and labour, is essential to socio-economic development in the Mediterranean and, more than ever, to **regional stability**.

We must help our economies to untap the full potential of youth and **women participation** in labour markets. We need to place Youth at the core of regional cooperation efforts in order to make them active players of the region's future.

In particular, for women empowerment, the UfM's upcoming women conference, to be held in Barcelona on 10-11 October, is dedicated to discussing the possible means to foster women's access into labour market.

We probably must also enhance efforts at regional level to promote and improve **vocational education and training** through increased networking, peer-learning and cooperation between providers including the private sector. I would like to mention the initiative we are currently working with the Luxembourg Government on vocational training.

And indeed we should involve increasingly and directly the **private sector** and promote its key contribution to regional integration efforts. This is what we have engaged in the framework of the UfM private sector strategy launched in 2014 and through the different projects developed under Med4Jobs.

In implementation of your decisions today, we will use the numerous partnerships developed by the Secretariat to expand UfM activities and to give leverage to regional cooperation and develop effective interactions between cooperation actors.



Ministers,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to conclude by saying once more how important our regional dimension is. Long term sustainable growth and competitiveness lies undoubtedly in the capacity of the region to be one.

UFM Countries account for 800 Million people. The potential for an increased integration and job creation is huge and would bring significant benefits for the whole region.

Success stories exist. We must build on them, continuing identifying concrete steps and measures with Governments, private sectors and all stakeholders in order to step up our regional cooperation.

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

Thank you for your attention.