



# NEWSLETTER

ISSUE N. 15

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## EDITORIAL

The UfM Ministerial Meeting on Labour and Employment (27 September, Jordan) has set a stronger regional cooperation framework for tangible initiatives and projects on youth employability in the Mediterranean. The 43 UfM Member States have reaffirmed their commitment to a comprehensive regional dimension and support the UfM Secretariat's initiatives to foster human development and job creation, especially for our youth, which is the main asset for the future and stability of our region. We need to place young people at the core of regional cooperation efforts to make them active players of the region's socio-economic future. At present, the UfM Mediterranean Initiative for Jobs (Med4Jobs) has 12 projects running, targeting over 100,000 young people and supporting the development of over 800 SMEs.

*The UfM Secretariat's team*

## DID YOU KNOW?



## Union for the Mediterranean commits to fight structural unemployment

- The member countries of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) defined in September key measures to address the persisting challenge of unemployment in the Mediterranean region, particularly for young people and women.



At the third Ministerial Conference on Employment and Labour held last month in Jordan, ministers of UfM member countries reaffirmed their commitment to work together to address the challenges relating to employment, employability and decent work. **The European Commission – represented by H.E. Marianne Thyssen, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility – and Jordan's Labour Minister H.E. Ali Al-Ghezawi were the co-Presidents of the two day UfM-meeting.**

**Minister Al-Ghezawi** emphasized: *"All the southern countries are facing issues of high unemployment mainly for females and youth. We need to think about innovative ideas to spur economic growth as the most effective factor in creating jobs and mitigating the impact of the unemployment on socio-economic aspects taking into consideration the impact of the Syrian crisis on these countries. We also have to find a better mechanism for skills matching, enhancing female*

*economic participation and encouraging the formalization procedures."*

**Commissioner Thyssen** stated: *"In some countries on the Mediterranean shore, as much as half of the young people are out of a job. We cannot allow this. Decent jobs and good opportunities in life are among the best measures to invest in our future. Therefore, it is time to give a new impetus to our UfM cooperation. We need inclusive labour markets which provide equal chances to all: women and men, the young and the old, university graduate and school dropouts."*

**The Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean, H.E. Fathallah Sijilmassi**, stated: *"We are here today to enhance the regional dimension and the collaborative approach of our common cooperation efforts to reinforce the human capital, which is the key for stability and security in the region. We need to place youth employability at the core of our regional cooperation initiatives to make our young people*

*active players of the region's socio-economic future."*

The full-day meeting addressed the most pressing issues in the region: promoting job creation, improving youth employment and employability (including job matching and placement, strengthening public employment services), and promoting social dialogue. Moreover, the ministers discussed ways to contribute to growth, decent work and inclusion, for example by facilitating the transition from the informal to the formal economy and addressing challenges due to the refugee crisis.

Ministers at the Conference asserted the value of a common approach to address the issue of unemployment, particularly of young people and women, as a means to consolidate stability in the region. This regional effort towards job creation and decent work is crucial in the wider context of the recent commitments made by the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) towards sustainable development and decent work as enshrined in the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

The participating ministers consulted with representatives of social partners from both shores of the Mediterranean underlined the importance of tripartite and bipartite social dialogue. They welcomed the plan to organize a UfM Social Dialogue Forum in 2017/2018 and the financial support of EUR 3 million provided by

the EU to the regional 'Pilot project for the Promotion of Social Dialogue in the Southern Mediterranean Neighbourhood'. This project with a total budget of EUR 3.75 million will be first implemented in Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan as priority countries and may possibly be expanded to other UfM partner countries. The social partners presented a common Declaration on Social Dialogue.

Structural and sustainable policy recommendations and reforms to promote job creation were also on the discussion table. The ministers

strongly supported an integrated two-track approach, which addresses both the demand-side and the supply-side of the labour market. This means that measures in the form of macro-economic policies and private sector-led growth (demand), but also measures as vocational training and employability (supply), need to be taken simultaneously. The cross cutting priority is the transition from informal to formal employment, in order to guarantee the quality of jobs. To this end, the ministers encouraged national authorities to actively support the transition, in line with existing ILO efforts.

In conclusion, the Secretariat of the UfM emphasized that it stands ready to support the outcomes of the Conference and make sure that political decisions translate in concrete projects to benefit young people. For example, the [Mediterranean Initiative for Jobs \(Med4Jobs\)](#), the flagship programme of the Secretariat launched in 2013 and developed with the support of the member countries, includes 12 projects under implementation in the Mediterranean region.

## UfM Women Conference urgently calls for the full participation of women as main vectors for regional stability and development

- High-level participants stressed on October 10-11, the necessity of a common vision and a regional framework to find concrete solutions to better mobilise the full potential of women.
- All the 250 participants demonstrated the essential contribution of women to greater sustainable development, creating job opportunities, effective fight against extremism and radicalisation, and promotion of stability in the region.
- Best practices and concrete initiatives were proposed. The UfM Secretariat and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, UNIDO, launched the 2nd phase of a €4.5M project to support women-led investments and businesses in the Southern Mediterranean region.

The UfM Secretariat held on 10-11 October 2016, at its headquarters in Barcelona, the 3rd high-level conference on women's empowerment "[Women for the Mediterranean: Driving force for development and stability](#)". The Conference witnessed the participation of high-level personalities such as the Minister of Social Development of Jordan, **Wajih Azaizeh**, the Minister of Women and Family Affairs of Tunisia, **Néziha Labidi**, the former vice-president

of the Government of Spain and President of Mujeres por África, **María Teresa Fernández de la Vega** and the President of the National Council for Women of Egypt, **Maya Morsi**. Engaged women from the civil society also participated, such as **Inès Safi**, Researcher at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, **Nabila Hamza**, Member of the Civicus Gender Working Group Advisory Board, and **Suzanne Jabbour**, Restart Center Director and Member of the

UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture from Lebanon.

In the framework of the active cooperation between the UfM and the UfM Parliamentary Assembly, the Committee on Women's Rights of the Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM also gathered in Barcelona on this occasion. The Conference was held in partnership with the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) and the German





agency for international development cooperation (GIZ).

Over the 2 days, the Conference provided a regional dialogue forum where the 250 participants from more than 30 countries stressed the need to invest in the essential contribution of women as a response to the current Mediterranean challenges, including inclusive growth, extremism and radicalisation as well as migration challenges. The conference featured a wealth of exchanges of experiences, best practices and concrete initiatives.

• **Launch of the 2nd phase of the UfM-UNIDO project “Promoting women’s empowerment for inclusive and sustainable industrial development in the MENA region”**

The [project is contributing to enhance women’s economic inclusion](#) by harnessing the potential of women entrepreneurs in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia, and facilitating an inclusive policy dialogue to achieve an enabling environment for women’s entrepreneurship in the region. Endorsed by the UfM Member States in November 2015 with a total budget of €4.5M, the project is promoted by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). Over 2,000

female entrepreneurs are expected to benefit from the project’s activities resulting in an estimated number of 500 promising business projects.

• **Preliminary findings from the UfM Regional Dialogue on Women’s Empowerment**

The Conference was the occasion to discuss the preliminary findings from the “Regional Dialogue on women’s empowerment”, launched by the UfM Secretariat throughout 2015 and 2016. This platform has gathered representatives from UfM governments, international experts on gender equality, as well as international and civil society organisations to review the current situation of women in the socio-economic life, the progress achieved since the [Paris Ministerial commitments](#) and prepare for the 2017 Ministerial Meeting, pushing forward a strong regional agenda on gender equality.

UfM Secretary General Fathallah Sijilmassi stated that: “*Youth and women are catalysts for change, a source of innovation and an engine for growth. Equality between men and women is a vector for inclusive growth, democracy and stability in the Mediterranean region and this is why*

*at the UfM we have placed women’s empowerment at the heart of our regional initiatives”.*

*“Women are the most influential players against the extremist discourse in the region and beyond” said Wajih Azaizeh, Minister of Social Development of Jordan.*

*“It is essential to strengthen the strategies and common instruments between North and South to find sustainable and practical solutions to the challenges related to regional development, stability and security. This is the spirit of our regional dialogue and the approach of the Union for the Mediterranean”, stated Delphine Borione, UfM Senior Deputy Secretary General.*

Up to October 2016, UfM activities have already reached direct tangible impact with a potential of growing further, in particular on youth employability, inclusive growth and women’s empowerment: 25 projects with impact on close to 200,000 individuals. Out of these 25 cooperation projects, the UfM-led [Mediterranean Initiative for Jobs \(Med4Jobs\)](#) has currently 12 projects running in the Southern and Northern shores of the Mediterranean, targeting over 100,000 young job seekers and entrepreneurs, and supporting the development of over 1,000 small and medium-sized companies.

There is a growing evidence of the link between women’s empowerment and a significant impact in higher rates of education, increased economic growth, social cohesion, leading to more stability, peace and development. By promoting an equal participation of women in the labour market and in public life, the GDP could increase by an estimated \$28 trillion or 26%, by 2025 (Source: McKinsey Global Institute).

## MedCOP Climate 2016 in Tangier: The UfM backs concrete schemes to drive a shared Mediterranean climate agenda

- The Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean was an institutional partner of the Tangier region for MedCOP Climate 2016, which took place in Tangier on 18 and 19 July 2016 and was attended by more than 2,000 representatives of the Mediterranean countries, civil society, various international and regional organisations, economic stakeholders and experts.
- MedCOP Climate 2016 provided a forum to present various initiatives and projects supported by the UfM that are helping to formulate a Mediterranean climate agenda, such as the creation of a Mediterranean network of young people working on climate issues; the Regional Committee for Cooperation on Climate Finance, to make funding for climate projects in the region more efficient; and the launch of the UfM Energy University by Schneider Electric.



MedCOP Climate 2016, held in Tangier on 18 and 19 July 2016, furthered the development of a Mediterranean climate agenda. MedCOP Climate was both a crucial milestone in the region's preparations for COP22, to be held in Marrakesh on 7-18 November 2016, and a milestone in the implementation of the Paris Agreement, through specific regional actions.

The Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), an institutional partner of the Tangier region for this edition of MedCOP Climate 2016, has been helping to develop these initiatives. The UfM Secretary General, Fathallah Sijilmassi, declared that *"The fight against climate deregulation in the Mediterranean region can only be won by strengthening regional cooperation and developing concrete schemes. This is the UfM's core business. So it was natural for the UfM*

*Secretariat to be not just a partner in this great forum of exchange that is MedCOP Climate 2016, but also to contribute with projects that have a regional impact".*

To this end, the Secretariat supported the **creation of a Mediterranean network of young people working on climate issues**. In July, this network included five organisations from both the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean with the purpose of bringing together a large number of youth associations in the Mediterranean to develop shared regional projects to fight against climate change. By then, more than fifty associations in the Mediterranean region expressed an interest in forming part of this network by taking part in the first Mediterranean Youth Climate Forum on 17 July, the eve of MedCOP 2016.

The UfM Secretariat also held its **third meeting of the Regional Committee for Cooperation on Climate Finance on 18 July 2016**. This committee was set up by the UfM and it brings together the principal international funders of climate initiatives in the Mediterranean (Green Climate Fund, Global Environmental Facility, the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the UNEP-DTU partnership, etc.). Its goal is to **promote cooperation and to make funding of climate projects and initiatives in the Mediterranean more efficient** for cities by sharing experiences and information among funders. The third meeting of the committee put finance providers, donors and various specialist UN agencies in contact with the Mediterranean networks that are working for sustainable cities in order to discuss the funding of these cities in their fight against climate deregulation.

MedCOP Climate 2016 was also the occasion for **the launch of the UfM Energy University by Schneider Electric**. This project sets out to provide free online training on renewable energy and energy efficiency. These free online courses are aimed at professionals working in

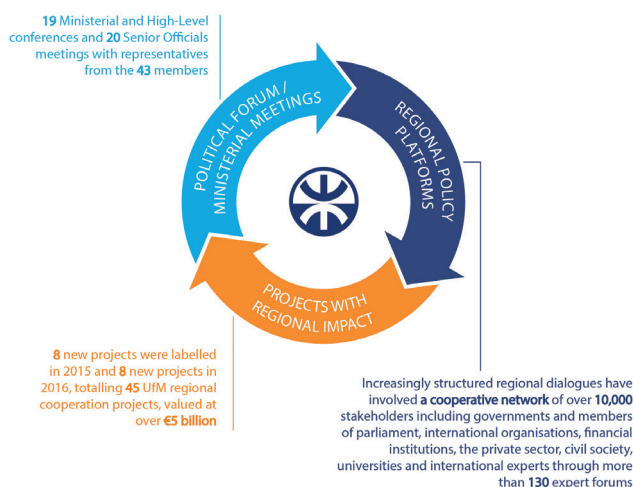
the energy industry in UfM countries. The courses are offered and the certification is recognised by 23 international industry associations.

The UfM Secretariat took part in numerous discussions, workshops and events at MedCOP Climate 2016,

particularly on issues relating to energy transition, decarbonising shipping and gender equality in relation to climate deregulation. Through these actions, and in close collaboration with all the Mediterranean stakeholders, the Union for the Mediterranean, under the

leadership of its two co-presidencies, the European Union and Jordan, is thus helping to develop a Mediterranean climate agenda. It is essential to build this shared agenda in order to better capitalise on the opportunities provided by low-carbon and sustainable development in the region.

## Unleashing the potential of the Mediterranean: the UfM promotes 45 regional cooperation projects in 2016



The Mediterranean is facing challenges on an unprecedented scale that are linked to terrorism, extremism and uncontrolled migration, but also to pressing environmental and socio-economic issues such as climate change and youth unemployment. There is also a largely untapped potential of opportunities ready to be seized in the region. Effective regional integration is more essential than ever in order to ensure a better socio-economic future for the Mediterranean, a necessary condition for stability in the region.

Under the leadership of the UfM Co-Presidency, held by the EU and Jordan, and the active involvement of all Member States, the UfM Secretariat has developed a specific methodology that has yielded tangible results and provided new momentum for

regional cooperation efforts. Until the end of June, Member States had so far approved **45 cooperation projects representing more than €5 billion in investment for the region**. Of those projects, 22 of which were then already under implementation, benefitting more than **100,000 citizens** in the fields of **youth employment and inclusive growth**, **50,000** in the field of **women's socio-economic empowerment** and supporting the development of close to **1,000 small and medium enterprises** in the region.

*"I am currently a young entrepreneur in my country. I've just set up my own company with the aim of building a private school to provide pre-school, primary, junior and secondary education in a rural area of Morocco",* said Sukeina El Bouj, a young woman beneficiary of the Union

for the Mediterranean Initiative for employment (Med4Jobs). She was developing her project in June after having had the opportunity to undertake an entrepreneurship training programme, which included an internship at the European Investment Bank (EIB).

The UfM has also actively contributed to fostering regional dialogue and cooperation by regularly convening partners and stakeholders, who until June included **more than 10,000 representatives from governments and members of parliament, international organisations, financial institutions, the private sector, civil society, universities and international experts**.

*"We must reinforce the regional dimension and the collaborative approach of our common cooperation efforts to foster human development and job creation, especially for our youth, our main asset for the future and stability of our region",* said UfM Secretary General Fathallah Sijilmassi at the UfM Ministerial Meeting on Regional Cooperation and Planning, held on 2 June. *"The UfM Secretariat is committed to further contribute, through its activities, to tackling the socio-economic root causes of the current security and migration challenges by means of an enhanced common agenda for human development, stability and integration in the Mediterranean. Investing in regional integration is investing in stability and peace",* he added.



The recently signed UfM [Ministerial Declaration](#) on Regional Cooperation and Planning; the UfM Ministerial Conference: “[Towards a common development agenda for the Mediterranean](#)”, held on 26 November

2015 on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Barcelona declaration; the EU Foreign Affairs Council’s [conclusions](#), released on 14 December 2015; and the new [European Union Neighbourhood](#)

#### [Policy for the period 2014-2020](#)

provided new prospects for the UfM and highlighted its role as the central platform for regional cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

## Development and peace go hand in hand: UfM & Germany launch new project to promote youth employment in the region

- The YouMatch – Toolbox Project, promoted by Germany’s Development Agency GIZ in coordination with the UfM Secretariat, falls under the UfM Med4Jobs initiative.
- The project is centred on the link between labour demand and supply with the key idea to improve employment services for youth.
- Commissioned and funded by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ), the project is implemented by GIZ in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia.



The UfM labelled project “YouMatch – Toolbox Project” was officially launched last July in Amman at the occasion of the Regional Dialogue on Employment Services for Youth (MENA), co-organized by the Secretariat of the UfM and the [Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit](#) (GIZ), Germany’s Agency for International Development, promoter of the project. Youth unemployment rates in the Mediterranean region were then among the highest in the world: 25%

on average, which was double the worldwide average. This crucial issue affects countries on both the southern and the northern shores of the Mediterranean.

The [YouMatch initiative](#) serves policy makers, private sector representatives and civil society to initiate an ongoing dialogue on innovative solutions to address the challenge of providing our youth with sustainable employment opportunities. The initiative is centered on the link between labour demand

and supply with the key idea to improve employment services for youth and it aims at promoting regional peer learning and knowledge-sharing in the field of youth employment.

A first Preparatory Workshop & Practitioners’ Dialogue took place in Milan, Italy in October 2015. Representatives from labour ministries, business associations, civil society and youth organizations as well as bilateral employment promotion programmes from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia came together and laid the ground for this new initiative in the region.

Following the inputs and joint reflections in Milan, a comprehensive working approach for the MENA region, the so-called Toolbox Project, has been developed by GIZ in cooperation with UfM Secretariat, under the job intermediation pillar of the [Med4Jobs initiative](#).

The Toolbox Project focuses on selected employment services for youth as pilot examples, taken from the service clusters of job orientation, job preparation or placement services. Based on good practices / case studies of existing approaches within the MENA region, peer working groups together with a facilitators' team will analyze substantial challenges and success factors for the implementation of the identified tools, engage in the further development and elaboration of innovative labour market solutions and ultimately implement innovation and transfer projects in partner countries. Thus, practitioners will be strengthened in their capacities to render effective employment services to the benefit of young job seekers and employers looking for qualified staff.

In this framework, the Regional Dialogue on Employment Services for Youth (MENA) took place in Amman on the 18-20 July 2016 with the objectives to:

- Reinforce the YouMatch knowledge sharing and peer learning idea and deepen the professional networking among the stakeholders from the participating MENA countries,
- Learn about employment promotion strategies and service offers for young jobseekers in Jordan and share own good practices,
- Gain stakeholders' and practitioners' commitment to connect on the YouMatch platform and to actively engage in working groups related to the Toolbox Project,

- Agree on milestones, formats and a work plan for regional peer working groups on selected employment services and/or jointly defined challenges.

Experienced employment services practitioners and change agents from the public and private sector, from civil society organizations and employment promotion programmes of the involved countries attended the meeting in Amman where the "YouMatch – Toolbox Project" was officially launched.

This initiative was presented at the [UfM Ministerial on Labour and Employment](#), which was held in Jordan, on 27 September 2016.

## Institutional partnership to strengthen intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region

• Representatives of the main institutions working in the field of intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean region met on 11-12 July 2016 at Casa Árabe, Madrid, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain, to strengthen their synergies and complementarities and take joint action for wider and more significant impact in promoting intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

• Participants agreed to work towards a Euro-Mediterranean agenda, exchanging good practices, developing joint actions and supporting regional events, such as the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Forum 2016, which took place in Valletta, Malta, on 24 and 25 October 2016.

On 11-12 July 2016 a meeting of institutional focal points on Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue was held, with the participation of representatives of the major institutions contributing to Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue in the region, including the European Union/European External Action Service, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF), the UN Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Inter-

religious and Inter-cultural Dialogue (KAICIID) and the UfM Secretariat.

The focal points representing each institution conducted a mapping exercise of existing tools and actions in this field, with the aim to identify areas of collaboration, establish coordination mechanisms and set out a roadmap towards a Euro-Mediterranean intercultural and interreligious dialogue regional agenda.

Participants agreed to coordinate actions in support of the most relevant regional gathering in this field, the [Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Forum 2016](#), which took place in **Valletta, Malta, on 24 and 25 October 2016**. The Forum brought together civil society organisations, youth associations, regional institutions, media bodies, donor agencies and foundations to exchange practices, to promote partnerships and to advocate for policy and operational measures



for a new horizon of people-to-people cooperation around the Mediterranean, based on a set of common values and putting intercultural dialogue as the central tool for this cooperation and as a response to the main regional socio-cultural challenges.

This meeting of focal points comes as a follow-up to [the 22 July 2015 high-level meeting](#) held at the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain, at the Union for the Mediterranean headquarters in Barcelona, where participating institutions dealing with intercultural and interfaith dialogue agreed to strengthen their synergies and complementarities and take joint action to reach a wider and more significant impact in the Mediterranean.



Given the magnitude of challenges facing the region, it is essential that all efforts be made to bridge any potential cultural divide, to fight against extremism, racism and all forms of exclusion and to build upon a common heritage and aspirations. Intercultural and interfaith dialogue in the Mediterranean is an important

underlying dimension of all regional cooperation activities in the framework of the UfM. It also requires specific attention and approach for which the [Anna Lindh Foundation](#) (ALF) is the focal institution.

## Governments and institutions in Paris and Amman worked with the UfM Secretariat to push forward the regional agenda on gender equality

- More than 30 UfM government representatives and key stakeholders involved in gender equality met in the framework of the UfM Regional Dialogue on Women's Empowerment to move forward with preparing the next UfM Ministerial Conference on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society, expected to take place in 2017.
- The first two working groups on access of women to leadership positions and on women's participation in economic life gathered in Paris and Amman to review progress achieved on these issues and prepare recommendations for action.

The UfM regional dialogue on Women's Empowerment, launched in 2015, involves UfM Member States and also international organisations, civil society and private sector representatives. It aims to examine the implementation of regional commitments adopted by the [2013 UfM Ministerial Conference on "Strengthening the Role of Women in Society"](#) particularly through four working groups focusing on women's participation in economic life, the fight against violence, women's access to positions of leadership and changing gender stereotypes.

**Two of these working groups have gathered on 12 and 19 July, respectively, in Paris and Amman to work on drawing up a progress report which will contribute to the conclusions of the next UfM Ministerial Conference on Women's Empowerment.**

### • Promoting women's access to leadership and decision-making positions

On 12 July in Paris, the working group on "Women's access to leadership and decision-making positions", co-chaired

by France and the OECD, discussed the commitments that still need to be achieved to increase the access of women to leadership positions, both in the public sector and the corporate sector. A first preliminary report, prepared following analysis of the UfM countries' reports, was discussed by the participants, who also benefitted from a presentation of the studies performed by the OECD in this field. Participants analysed the state of play, the current barriers (cultural, structural, organisational and self-imposed) and best practices



implemented until then within the Member States. They also discussed how governments, through the implementation of public policies, could more efficiently foster women's access to leadership and decision-making positions.

#### • Promoting women's participation in economic life

The working group meeting on "Raising women's participation in economic life", co-chaired by Italy and UNIDO, on 19 July in Amman, followed the same methodology and also brought together a variety of key stakeholders in the Euro-Mediterranean region to discuss in particular policies to reduce informal work, promote entrepreneurship, access finance

and markets, and promote work-life balance. Speakers from Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Palestine and the European Union, including prominent representatives of the public and private sectors, women's business associations, successful women entrepreneurs, NGOs and international organisations, took part in this meeting.

*"In a collaborative and partnership-based approach, we strive to involve governments but also the main international actors, to identify constraints and common solutions to advance the Mediterranean gender agenda in the region. Fostering women's access to leadership positions and their participation in economic life*

*are two conditions for promoting the role of women, but also to strengthen the development and stability of our countries", SDSG Delphine Borione said.*

In parallel with this meeting, UNIDO also organised a High-Level Conference on "Promoting Women's Empowerment for Inclusive and Sustainable Industrial Development in North Africa and the Middle East".

Following these two working group meetings, the two other working groups met in September 2016 and were dedicated to the fight against stereotypes and violence against women and gender-based violence.

The 4th regional dialogue meeting took place on 6 October as part of the annual [High-Level UfM Conference on Women's Empowerment](#), which brought together the main stakeholders fostering women's empowerment around the Mediterranean to share ideas, experiences, initiatives and recommendations regarding the essential role that women play in promoting peace, development and stability.

## FEATURED INTERVIEW

### UfM interviews Pau Relat, Chief Executive Officer of Mat Holding

Pau Relat, CEO of MAT Holding and President of the Internationalisation Commission of the Chamber of Commerce of Barcelona

Pau Relat, Chief Executive Officer of MAT Holding, has a degree in pharmacy from the University of Barcelona and MBA in IESE. Has a wide experience in the chemical sector, developed in Industrias Químicas del Valls as executive director. He is president of the Commission of Internationalization of the Chamber of Commerce in Barcelona

and member of the plenary, member of the General Council of Barcelona Fira and vice-president of FemCat Private Foundation of Entrepreneurs. Moreover, he was awarded as the Emergent Entrepreneurial of the year 2014 in Spain granted by EY, with the sponsorship of BNP Paribas and collaboration of IESE.

**UfM:** Let's speak about your business experience in the Mediterranean region. Please tell us about yourself as an entrepreneur and about your company since its creation. In which Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries do you have experience as an entrepreneur? What were the first steps in the internationalization process?



**Pau Relat (P. R.):** AT Holding is a global group specialized in crop protection and sustainable irrigation, as well as water conveyance and treatment. My career has been closely related to the group, where I have grown both personally and professionally. The company's family origins have constituted a factor that has boosted the group's competitiveness through a firm commitment to the professionalization of its management team – which has been responsible for the definition of the group's long-term growth strategy.

MAT Holding's history of internationalization began in 1993, when Spain was going through one of the worst economic crisis in recent decades. To guarantee the company's subsistence – knowing full well that our product was competitive and differential enough – we decided to open ourselves to new markets, such as Israel, Morocco, Turkey, Italy or Greece. We initially focused on exports to later create an international network of distributors in more than 40 countries. Finally, we consolidated as a global company with the opening of subsidiaries. Currently, we are leaders in the sectors in which we operate and are present in more than 100 countries around the world.

**UfM:** Various projects and initiatives of the UfM Secretariat are aimed to provide young entrepreneurs with the

necessary tools to transform their business ideas into a reality. What do you think about the socio-economic potential of the region for the creation and development of SMEs? What differences do you see among the countries of the region regarding the entrepreneurial culture and prospects?

**P. R.:** The Euro-Mediterranean region has a very high growth potential for the development of corporate projects by both big companies and SMEs. Young entrepreneurs have excellent development opportunities ahead, as a lot remains to be done – specially in terms of infrastructure, water treatment and everything related to the sustainable economy. The significant human pressure and water scarcity in the Mediterranean region will force us to look for solutions to meet the population's future food and water needs. With regards to the different business dynamics, each country has its own singularities and degree of maturity, which means that economic perspectives will be different. In general, however, this currently is the group of countries with the largest growth potential.

*“The Mediterranean basin constitutes one of the regions with the largest growth potential in the world. Young entrepreneurs must believe in the future and assume certain risks, by analysing their project's viability in cooperation with local partners.”*

**UfM:** As an experienced entrepreneur you have possibly seen various companies that struggled to stay in the market regardless a valuable idea

behind their businesses. What could be the key elements for the success of businesses in the region?

**P. R.:** Developing a successful project depends on multiple factors. Obviously, you will need a good product or service that provides an answer to the needs of the market – thanks to its differential value. But it's equally important to have a good knowledge of each country's culture and particularities. Do not look for immediate profits, but rather commit to that country, to its population, associate with local partners with proven experience in that market. By doing this, it is possible to minimize risks and earn the trust of local clients and other potential partners. The process of foreign market identification, opening and consolidation is long and costly. However, with a long-term vision, the right team and local knowledge it also provides interesting opportunities and allows you to spread risk by not binding yourself to the fluctuations of a single economy.

**UfM:** The UfM Ministerial Meeting on Labour and Employment took place last September in Jordan. In your opinion, to what extent favouring a climate for SMEs development in the region could encourage job creation? Could you cite any concrete example?

**P. R.:** Through initiatives such as the mentioned employment forum that took place in September in Jordan, the UfM constitutes one of the region's main drivers. It is a key organisation for the growth of the Mediterranean basin economies that works by promoting integration and cooperation between countries in said region. Each year, tens of projects are carried out to boost synergies between countries, to facilitate agreements between universities, to promote student exchange programs, to drive the creation of new businesses and the development of the business ideas

of young entrepreneurs and even to improve the role of women in the business world. The UfM has become a very important accelerator for the region's economic development.

**UfM:** The future of the Mediterranean region is strictly connected to the climate change and water scarcity issues. Would you consider this as a business opportunity for the local entrepreneurs? How could they use it not only to develop their own companies but also to confront the consequences of climate change?

**P. R.:** Sure enough, water is very limited resource and the way we use it and recycle it will be crucial to the region's future. Projects that put

the focus on the responsible use of drinking and irrigation water while respecting the environment will be better received, as they contribute to the sustainability and the improvement of local living conditions.

In a nutshell, companies and entrepreneurs that create new solutions and systems in which sustainability is a prime concern – therefore guaranteeing the correct management of resources for future generations – will have a significant competitive advantage.

**UfM:** What's the best piece of advice you would give to a young Mediterranean entrepreneur who would like to start a new business idea in the region?

**P. R.:** The Mediterranean basin constitutes one of the regions with the largest growth potential in the world. There is still a long way ahead to improve infrastructure, to modernize production systems and water treatment, to optimize crop yields, etc. Young entrepreneurs must firmly commit to this region by evaluating risks and business opportunities. Usually, a lot of these projects have been cut short or haven't materialised due to the lack of cultural knowledge regarding the region's different countries, or due to an exaggerated risk perception that is not real. Youths must believe in the future and assume certain risks, by analysing their project's viability in cooperation with local partners.

### About Mat Holding

MAT Holding is an industrial group present in more than 100 countries in the five continents that operates in the phytosanitary (IQV) and water (Regaber, Hidroglobal and Dorot)

sectors. With 80 years of history and headquartered in Parets del Vallès (Barcelona), MAT Holding develops and produces efficient and sustainable solutions for crop protection and irrigation, as well as for water conveyance and

treatment. With an income of 220 million Euros in 2015, the group currently employs 560 workers and operates four industrial plants in Cheste, Israel, Mollet del Vallès and Parets del Vallès.

## AGENDA 2016

**24-25 October** 3rd Euro-Mediterranean Forum on Intercultural Dialogue. La Valletta, Malta

**1 November** Launching event of the "Integrated Programme for the Protection of the Lake Bizerte against Pollution". Tunis, Tunisia

**2-3 November** ANIMA EMEA Business Forum, within the context of the Mediterranean Economic Week in Marseille. Marseille, France

**7-18 November** UfM activities at the COP22. Marrakesh, Morocco

11 November: Mediterranean Climate Agenda of the COP

14 November: Launching of UfM Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Platform and Launching of the SPREF Project

15 November: SPREF (SEMed Private Renewable Energy Framework) Conference

17 November: UfM High Level Side-Event on stability and sustainable development of the Mediterranean

**29-30 November** Med Ports Forum. Marseille, France

**30 November** MedaWeek 2016, Mediterranean Week of Economic Leaders. Barcelona, Spain

**- 2 December**

**1 December** UfM Ministerial Conference on Energy. Rome, Italy