

OPENING SESSION

Union for the Mediterranean Conference

“Towards a common development agenda for the Mediterranean”

Barcelona, November, 26th

Dear Copresidents of the UfM

Dear Ministers

Dear Elisabeth Guigou, President of the Anna Lindh Foundation

Dear Colleagues and partners of the UFM,

I would like to warmly welcome you here at the “Palau de Congressos de Catalunya” in the Beautiful city of Barcelona for the opening session of the UfM Conference *“Towards a common development agenda for the Mediterranean”*.

I would like to thank again the UfM Copresidents for their leadership and for their continuous support as well as the Member States and in particular the Spanish Secretary of State, Ignacio Ybáñez and the Spanish authorities for their permanent support and involvement in UfM activities.

And I want to extend my warmest gratitude to you all for your strong commitment towards enhancing the scope and the level of regional cooperation in our region.

1. Regional and international challenges

As it has been eloquently emphasized in the previous interventions our Conference is taking place in a particular regional and international context marked by:

- **An increasing magnitude of the regional security challenges** -the refugee crisis, the tragedies of illegal migration and the fight against terrorism, with the recent tragic attacks of Paris and Beirut. We saw it again yesterday in Tunisia.

- **But this leads to one main conclusion: A growing need to further increase our regional cooperation. The challenges are all regional therefore requiring a regional response.**
- **Yes, we have to recognize that there is a paradox. At a time when there is need to be all mobilized together in the defense of common values, against common aggressions, and despite our collective efforts, our region still has one of the lowest level of integration in the world. This is unacceptable in November 2015**
- **It is a paradox also because there is so much potential in the region and the different stakeholders present in this room and so many that could not make it with us today illustrate this potential, these are our assets, along with the existence of a positive agenda**

For all those reasons, the **20th anniversary of the Barcelona declaration and the review of the ENP** give us a unique opportunity to give a new impetus a new opportunity to accelerate our regional cooperation.

This UfM Conference, which has been preceded by an indepth high level political discussion between the Member States, aims to support a positive development agenda for the Mediterranean enabling us to collectively seize the numerous opportunities for growth and competitiveness, and increased economic regional integration.

2. Objectives of the UfM Conference

Dear Colleagues,

If we are gathered today, it is because we share a common belief in the principles that guide the Union for the Mediterranean:

- **The principle of co-ownership**

- **The principle of inclusiveness**
- **The action oriented approach**
- **The coherence and articulation between the national priorities and the region building**

On those basis, and with the support of all, I would like to recall here the activities of the Secretariat as they have been increasingly developing over the last 3 years.

1/ At the policy level : UfM Ministerial Conferences have been held to contribute towards building a common Mediterranean development agenda, by establishing strategic objectives and sector specific lines of action. Since 2012, seven Ministerial Conferences have been held in key sectors for the future of the region: industrial cooperation, transport, energy, strengthening the role of women in society, digital economy, environment and climate change, and blue economy. Tomorrow in our 26th SOM we will be discussing perspectives to hold another 4 or 5 Ministerial Meetings in strategic areas such as, energy, labour and employment, urban development and women empowerment.

These Ministerials provide regional policy framework, road maps and action plans which the secretariat ensures are followed-up. On the base of these regional policy frameworks the Secretariat acts as a platform for dialogue and partnership.

2/ The regional dialogue is developed through a multi-partners approach for promoting the exchange of views, ideas and best practices on common regional challenges between relevant partners and stakeholders, as well as developing regional and sub-regional networks. Increasingly structured regional dialogues have taken place under the UfM framework in the different sub-sectors of water, energy, urban development, transport, environment and climate change.

This dialogue is a priority task for the UfMS in particular in a context of an unfortunately very low level of regional integration. UfM organized 11 high level conferences and more than a hundred expert meetings, allowing exchanges within a network of cooperation of over 5000 stakeholders around the Mediterranean, including specialized organizations, Parliamentarians, NGOs and other civil society representatives, international financial institutions, promoters of projects, developments agencies, and private sector representatives

I would like here to praise the excellent collaboration that we have in this regard with the European Commission.

3/ The Operational dimension: the projects. Building on the strategic priorities defined by the governments within the framework of the ministerial conferences and framed through the regional dialogues, the Secretariat has been developing concrete regional projects with tangible impact on the ground. These projects, with a clear regional focus and an impact-oriented approach, range from big infrastructure investment projects to technical assistance, capacity building and training programmes, developing innovative methodologies with a view to build on best practices and replicate success stories. So far UfM has labelled 33 regional projects worth around 5 billion Euros, financed from mixed sources, including: governments, financial institutions, development agencies, private sector. I am happy to report that more than half of them are today under implementation. You have on the table the activity report of the secretariat where you can find all the details but of course we are in regular contacts and consultations with your teams regarding the development of these projects and those that are still in the pipeline and that we hope we will be able to develop in 2016 and beyond.

These activities are concentrated around three priority themes, directly related to the challenges in the region :

1) Inclusive growth & youth employability,

2) Sustainable development

3) Women empowerment.

1) Inclusive growth & youth employability

So far, the UfMS has labeled **13 projects** directly addressing the challenges of youth employability and inclusive growth. Framed by the political mandate (in particular the mandate of the Ministerial conferences on industrial cooperation and digital economy) and nourished by the priorities expressed in the regional dialogues, these projects target approximately **200.000 beneficiaries, mostly young people**, and involve more than **1.000 small and medium private enterprises**. After an extensive consultation process with various stakeholders, the UfMS launched in 2013 a dedicated framework regional initiative (Med4Jobs) which defines priorities of intervention in terms of employability, intermediary services and job creation for the region, under which specific projects continue to be developed.

Here I want to highlight two projects:

- ✓ **Maharat-Med** which fosters youth employment and builds human capacities by providing structural training on employability skills, embeds entrepreneurial spirit in youth.
- ✓ **The “Euro-Mediterranean University of Fes”** is a new multidisciplinary center of excellence in the fields of higher education, research and innovation, for more than 6000 students from the Euro-Mediterranean region and beyond. The project will strongly contribute to improve international mobility and student employability.

2) Sustainable development

In the framework of its policy mandate provided by the respective Ministerial Conferences, the UfM strategic objectives will continue to focus on: advancing

the Euro-Mediterranean sustainable urban development strategy; facilitating transport over land and sea contributing to build a strong trans-Mediterranean network; contributing to de-pollution efforts in the region and improving access to water management; promoting renewable energy and energy efficiency; contributing to addressing the challenge of climate change in the region, while tapping the potential of the blue economy. **So far, 14 projects have been already labeled** by the 43 UfM countries with direct impact on the population of the areas involved.

In this field two flagship projects have been labelled:

- ✓ **The “Depollution Project of Lake Bizerte”** in Tunisia will rehabilitate the environment and water quality of the lake, improve sanitary and environmental conditions for an estimated **400,000 inhabitants** living close to the sources of pollution, and will develop local employment opportunities in the fields of sewage treatment, waste management, fisheries and agriculture

- ✓ **The UfM labeled “Imbaba Urban Upgrading Project”** strengthens the integration of Imbaba, one of the most populated urban areas of Egypt, with the city of Giza, by improving the basic facilities, infrastructures and services for its 700,000 inhabitants.

3) Women empowerment

Within the political framework defined in the Ministerial Declaration on Strengthening the Role of Women in Society held in 2013, the UfMS has worked on key strategic objectives such as advancing the regional agenda on gender equality, developing Euro-Mediterranean women’s empowerment initiatives and enhancing women’s access to the labour market and entrepreneurial networks. Under the achievements so far, 15 thematic workshops, seminars and

conferences with more than 2000 participants and **6 projects labeled by the 43 UfM countries, with a target of 50,000 beneficiaries.**

For example, the project **“Young Women as Job Creators”** promotes self-employment and entrepreneurship among young female university students who are interested in starting their own business. From the 2000 young female students foreseen as beneficiaries, more than 1000 have already been advised, mentored and trained for transforming their ideas into business.

To conclude, I would like to say that the numerous challenges we are facing are a true call for action. I believe that what we have achieved together is a clear signal of what we can do and that we can do even more in the coming weeks and months.

I would like to reiterate on behalf of the whole staff of the UfM secretariat to whom I would like to pay tribute in front of all of you, that we stand ready to work with you to further enhance our activities and their impacts for the benefit of our populations and for peace, stability and prosperity in our region.

I thank you for your attention.