



Union for the Mediterranean
Union pour la Méditerranée
الإتحاد من أجل المتوسط

**Informal Ministerial meeting of Western Mediterranean countries
on Blue Economy**

30 November 2017 – Naples, Italy

*Address by HE Mr Fathallah Sijilmassi
Secretary General of the Union for the Mediterranean*

Dear Commissioner Vella,

Dear Ministers,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very honored to be among you this morning for this important *Informal Ministerial meeting of Western Mediterranean countries* to officially launch the Initiative for the sustainable development of the Blue Economy in the Western Mediterranean.

Regional cooperation efforts for the enhancement of the Blue Economy potential in the region are advancing fast and remain promising. I cannot refrain from reiterating my satisfaction to see the progress achieved so far, and the increasing mobilization in the region to intensify efforts towards unfolding this potential.

On the other side of the avenue, the first UfM Regional Stakeholders Conference on the Blue Economy is taking place since yesterday. It has brought together more than 400 key regional players to discuss the important opportunities that this sector represents for job creation and investment in the Mediterranean, with a view of creating synergies and

partnerships towards the enhancement of the Blue Economy potential in the region.

The model for this conference is based on the successful Western Mediterranean Stakeholders conference held at the UfM headquarters last February, in which we already witnessed the important interest from UfM Member states and from regional to engage in developing this potential.

This replication of the model is a perfect illustration of the synergies and complementarities the UfM continuously supports and promotes, as a unique platform for global, regional, sub-regional and local multi-stakeholder partnerships.

I would like to share with you two messages in this regard:

1/ The sub-regional level of cooperation remains essential to intensify synergies and reinforce regional integration. The WestMed Initiative is in that sense central to put forward cooperation efforts in the Blue Economy field in the Western Mediterranean, and to continue identifying new and innovative methodologies, exchanging best practices and experiences and developing concrete actions with direct impacts on our societies and populations.

The Western Mediterranean region represents:

- 200 ports and terminals
- 700 million tons of freight
- 481 marine protected areas and Natura 2000 sites
- More than 200 million national and international overnight stays of tourists in coastal areas per year
- 36000 direct jobs on fishing vessels

These few figures reveal how immense the potential of Blue Economy development is in the region, not only for job creation, investment and growth, but also for reaching our overarching goals of regional integration, stability and security. The WestMed Initiative, with the special focus given to certain priority sectors, *“A safer and more secure maritime space”*; *“a smart and resilient blue economy”* and *“Better governance of the sea”*, is a

key framework for fully seizing these opportunities in the Western Mediterranean region.

I would like to warmly thank in this endeavor the UfM Co-Presidency, assumed by the European Union and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, for their outstanding leadership, and more particularly Commissioner Vella and DG MARE for their continuous support in this process. Our heartfelt gratitude also to the Government of Sweden for its firm commitment and support of regional cooperation efforts on Blue Economy in the Mediterranean region.

Allow me finally to also extend our deep gratitude to EASME for their work in the development of the Virtual Knowledge Center that the UfM is launching, allowing for the consolidation and sharing of relevant general, technical and sectorial information in the region, supporting the goals set by this sub-regional initiative: sharing knowledge and best practices, and identification of innovative solutions to put our goals into action.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2/ In a context of growing challenges in the Euro-Mediterranean region, relating to security, radicalisation and terrorism, irregular migration, unemployment or climate change, regional cooperation has never been more necessary. The initiatives mentioned above are crucial in that sense, but **our collective efforts need to be amplified.**

All cooperation efforts, as valuable as they may be, will only be up to the challenges and opportunities in the region if they are the result of a reaffirmed political will to implement a common regional and positive agenda for the Mediterranean and amplify its positive impact in our countries. Long term sustainable growth and competitiveness lies in the

capacity of the Mediterranean region to deal with this common regional agenda.

The UfM Ministerial Declaration on Blue Economy adopted in Brussels in 2015 had already recognized the importance of reinforcing this regional agenda; and the Declaration submitted to you for adoption this morning is another strong step in that direction, giving a new political impulse to the regional cooperation efforts for sustainable development in the Mediterranean.

I would like to express to you the readiness and determination of the Union for the Mediterranean to play its role, putting the capacities of the Secretariat, and our inclusive multi-partner dialogue and cooperation regional platforms, UfM projects and activities, at the disposal of the implementation of the following decisions taken in Naples today.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.