



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

Institute for the Mediterranean of the European Public Law Organization
Conference on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Union for the
Mediterranean

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Keynote speech delivered by the UfM Secretary General
H.E. Mr. Nasser Kamel

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be among you today at the Institute for the Mediterranean of the EPLO, participating in this conference on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Union for the Mediterranean.

In this regard, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Ambassador Sotirios Varouxakis, director of the institute, for his cordial invitation and warm hospitality.

Ambassador Varouxakis happens to be well versed on the Union for the Mediterranean due to his extensive knowledge and expertise in Euro-Mediterranean Affairs, including his successful tenure at the UfM Secretariat as Deputy Secretary General for Energy. I find it extremely fitting to be participating in such conference at the Roman Agora at the great city of Athens.

Our Mediterranean has always been a bridge among cultures.

It was on these shores that we have erected the world's first great libraries and academies, thereby sowing the seeds of art, philosophy, astronomy, and mathematics.

The Mediterranean has also contributed to defining present-day politics and international governance by giving the world the foundations of democracy, dating back to ancient Greece, and the basis of international order, enshrined in the Westphalian principles, which remain to be the basis of international relations to-date.

While the roots of the Mediterranean spirit strike deep into history, it was not until 1995 that such spirit saw a revival with the inception of the Barcelona Process, following several uplifting developments in the region.

The first half of the 90's was a period of optimism. The German reunification and the subsequent ending of the cold war marked a period of conciliation in Europe, while the Maastricht treaty ushered a new era of optimism driven by a European vision towards further integration. Moreover, the Oslo Accords had increased the prospect of a peaceful solution to one of the longest conflicts in the Middle-East.

At that time, we were keen on tearing down walls, both physical and ideological. As such, the regional setting was well prepared for an ambitious initiative of cooperation between both shores of the Mediterranean.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you know, the Barcelona Euro-Med Conference of November 1995 was the platform that launched the Barcelona Process, or Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. The process was initiated by the EU, consisting of 15 Member States at the time, to enhance its relations with 12 Southern and Eastern Mediterranean Countries through a unique and innovative framework that regulates both regional and bilateral aspects of cooperation, which focused on three main aspects: a political and security dialogue; an economic and financial partnership, including the establishment of a free trade area by 2010; and social, cultural and human partnership... Looking back, the creation of the Barcelona

process seemed to mark a zenith of a strong regional transformation towards cooperation and multilateralism. And for a short period of time, this process had seemed to be moving in the right direction.

It was not long after its launch, however, that the Barcelona Process had started experiencing a series of challenges pertaining to a changing regional scene and several structural policy shortcomings.

The peace process witnessed several setbacks, while the events of 9/11, and subsequently the 2003 invasion of Iraq, had escalated tension to an unprecedented level in the Middle-East.

Several criticisms were also directed towards elements of conditionality and the lack of co-ownership. Many implementation issues have also materialized, including the perception of a donor-recipient approach to cooperation.

That was when France, holding the EU presidency at the time, proposed in 2008 the launching of an initiative titled “The Barcelona Process: the Union for the Mediterranean”. Such proposal was met with enthusiasm, and on July 13th of the same year, the Euro-Mediterranean Heads of States and Governments met in Paris, with an unprecedented level of participation. It was a strong message of shared political will to revitalize efforts to transform the Mediterranean into an area of peace, democracy, cooperation and prosperity.

In their Joint Declaration of the Paris Summit, the Heads of States and Governments stressed the need for better co-ownership by all participants, as well as more relevance and visibility for the citizens.

The 43 participating States agreed to continue with renewed dynamism their quest for peace and cooperation in the Mediterranean in a renewed partnership for progress.

The Paris Summit Declaration, and subsequently the Marseilles Declaration in November 2008, marked a turning point in regional cooperation by introducing a more structured framework of cooperation emphasizing co-ownership and deliverables in the form of projects.

It was this realistic pragmatic approach that enabled the establishment of the UfM as a regional organization, with a membership of 43 Member States, from Northern and Southern Shores of the Mediterranean, working together on equal footing towards a shared vision, while minimizing the influence of inherent political differences among them.

The UfM has infused a new spirit into Euro-Mediterranean cooperation by introducing a unique governance structure based on equality, joint ownership, and consensus. The introduction of shared co-presidency between the North and the South highlighted the elements of co-decision and shared responsibility between both shores of the Mediterranean. Furthermore, the emphasis on projects constituted a big transition towards action-oriented cooperation.

Indeed, when we look at the UfM governance structure, we realize that it is the only inter-governmental organization in the region that brings the Northern and Southern countries to work on equal footing and representation.

Ten years after its launch, I must say that it works: the UfM action has proved its solidity, its efficiency and its added value in many fields.

After the establishment of the Secretariat in 2010, it has developed a unique action-driven methodology; one that has been in a continuous state of evolution and adaptation.

The *modus operandi* of the UfM is based on creating effective links between decisions taken by Member States on a political level and their operational translation into region-wide cooperation projects, which in return, contribute to the definition of relevant policies.

Such process involves fostering complementarity, dialogue, and synergies among several stakeholders from governmental institutions, regional and international organizations, local authorities, civil society, universities, private sector, and financial institutions. As such, the secretariat focuses its work on three main pillars; political fora, platforms of dialogue, and projects with regional impact (3Ps).

Moreover, recognizing the dynamic nature of cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region, the Secretariat also utilizes the principle of “variable

geometry”. This is done by facilitating collaboration between a limited number of countries, with emphasis on effective cooperation on concrete regional and sub-regional projects with deliverables. Such approach allows the secretariat to engage with sub-regional groups and initiatives. (5+5,)

Being an action-driven institution, the UfM Secretariat places considerable emphasis on projects, being a concrete dimension that enhances partnerships and interactions among project promoters, partners, and beneficiaries.

UfM expertise on projects has resulted in the labelling of more than 50 projects to date, varying from infrastructure projects to soft capacity building projects in the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the UfM Secretariat was being established, winds were changing direction on both shores of the Mediterranean. Indeed, our region had started going through drastic transformations.

First, the onset of the Arab Spring in 2010 marked an important geopolitical development in our region. While these events had initially reignited our aspirations towards a democratic and prosperous Mediterranean, they triggered major turbulences in our region as they ushered long and uncertain transitions in those countries. Although some countries were able to recover, others fell into conflicts that triggered devastating spillover effects in the Mediterranean.

The developments in Libya and Syria have unleashed a series of cascading events that have created an increasingly volatile regional context. Such prolonged conflicts have resulted in a serious humanitarian situation and an unprecedented wave of migration since the Second World War.

The institutional collapse and state of lawlessness have also provided a hosting environment for extremism to gestate and grow to an extent that jeopardizes regional stability and international security.

The eruption of such developments has, to a large extent, distracted cooperation efforts in the region by redirecting priorities from long-term development and regional integration goals towards dealing with rapidly emerging security challenges.

The latter was an uncharted area of cooperation for the UfM, as it was neither mandated, nor prepared to tackle.

Second, the situation in Europe was already challenging and complicated, as the EU faced one of its worst economic crisis since the Second World War.

The lackluster economic recovery from the economic crisis of 2008, coupled with drastic cuts in spending in several Euro-zone countries, had led to a difficult economic situation in Europe, as well as a heated discourse on the EU's response to the crisis.

Furthermore, the magnitude and impact of the refugee crisis had sparked fear of escalating economic and social pressures which led to calls for an isolationist approach and fueled a sense of Euroscepticism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

While these challenges had stalled cooperation in the Mediterranean for some time, the UfM was able to endure and move forward with its mission to enhance regional cooperation.

Several accomplishments have been achieved in this regard owing to the Secretariat's firm belief in the importance of building consensus among Member States, and tackling the root causes of the challenges that we face.

Building consensus and fostering dialogue among stakeholders in the region proved to be a powerful catalyst for change in the Mediterranean.

The UfM was able to provide a unique platform of dialogue for stakeholders and Member States to build ambitious agendas in different areas of cooperation. Since 2013, 15 Ministerial and 5 high-level meetings were held focusing on strategic issues ranging from water, energy, and urban development to employment, trade, women and youth empowerment.

The relationship between socioeconomic development, stability and security is a cyclical one.

As such, Socioeconomic and human development constitute an integral part of the Secretariat's activities.

The UfM Women agenda constitutes a good example in this regard. Ministerial Meetings launched the process, while working groups identified priority areas.

To complement such agenda with practical application aspects, UfM Member States labelled 8 regional projects targeting more than 50,000 women in the region.

Furthermore, a monitoring system is currently being developed by the Secretariat, with concrete indicators to follow up on the implementation of commitments.

Another example is the Mediterranean Initiative for Jobs (MED4Jobs), which focuses on youth, and demonstrates the UfM keen interest in socioeconomic and human development.

The initiative is an ensemble of 13 projects that aim to enhance the employability of young men and women closing the gap between labor market supply and demand, and fostering a culture of entrepreneurship.

On Environment and Climate Change, an ambitious UfM Water Agenda, as well as its financial strategy, were developed by the Secretariat, and adopted by Member States last November aiming to enhance their regional cooperation towards sustainable and integrated water management in the UfM Region.

The Secretariat has also launched a series of studies on Climate Finance in the Southern Neighborhood countries to identify the flow of climate finance, and assist them accessing such finance for adaptation and mitigation efforts.

Moreover, UfM projects continued growing. In 9 years since the establishment of the Secretariat, Member States have labelled 53 projects that improve the daily lives of many citizens all over the region, with a total value of more than 5 billion Euros. Examples of such projects include the Lake Bizerte Protection Program in Tunisia.

The project brings an integrated model of industrial depollution and inclusive sustainable development that improves the living conditions in a region populated by nearly half a million people.

Other examples of projects currently being undertaken are the Gaza Desalination Facility, aiming to deliver an essential response to the needs of 2 million inhabitants, and the Imbaba Urban Upgrading Project, which aims to improve the living conditions in one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in Greater Cairo.

Ten years after its launch, I must say that UfM activities have proved their robustness, efficiency and added value in many fields.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Besides its unique adaptable institutional structure, and despite a difficult regional set-up, several factors have contributed to the rapid growth of UfM activities over the past few years, including the continued support and commitment of our Member States, and a relatively improving geopolitical landscape around the Mediterranean.

The latter can be seen in the recovery of several Southern Mediterranean countries, receding migratory pressure from the South, and the emergence of several successful sub regional initiatives in the Mediterranean.

These factors have allowed us to hold three successive Regional Forums following a hiatus that lasted 4 years.

During the last Regional Forum held in October 2018 on its 10th Anniversary, Foreign Ministers acknowledged resilience of the UfM and its ability to bring an added value to cooperation during turbulent times.

In spite of this, we remain far from achieving the mission of the UfM in a way that corresponds to our ambitions.

While the path remains long and arduous, I believe that we can overcome many challenges through a renewed commitment to cooperation and multilateralism.

In this regard, we are counting on the invaluable contribution of academic institutions towards pushing forward an agenda of cooperation in the Mediterranean. The latter certainly includes the stellar work undertaken by your esteemed institute.

Finally, I would like to conclude by saying that the UfM was a realization of legitimate aspirations and common vision; an institution that was created in a pinnacle of hope, endeavored and endured during turbulent times, and remains the only platform of regional cooperation in a setting where multilateralism and cooperation have become indispensable.

Erecting walls is no longer feasible in a globalized world that has grown more connected than ever. Only together can we still reach our goals towards a stable, prosperous Euro-Mediterranean Region.

Thank you.