



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

15th Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM

Strasbourg, France - 14 February 2019

Remarks by the UfM Secretary General

H.E. Mr. Nasser Kamel

Your Excellency, President Antonio Tajani, President of the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM

Distinguished Members of the Bureau and the Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2018 was a very important year for the Union for the Mediterranean, as we marked the 10th anniversary of the Paris Summit that set up the bases for this new institutional framework that unites the entire Euro-Mediterranean region.

As the Co-Presidency had the opportunity to point out, in an editorial co-signed by High Representative Federica Mogherini and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ayman Safadi (as well as my humble person, as Secretary-General of the UfM), “The UfM is a unique space for dialogue, and the only one where all countries of the region

are able to focus on their shared interest in sustainable security and human development, through practical cooperation on common projects.”.

It represents – even today – an ambitious, multi-sectorial and multi-layered new paradigm in cooperation and dialogue, deeply established in the principles of equal-footing, co-ownership and joint-definition of priorities, and strongly engaged in the development of a positive agenda for the socio-economic development of the region. One that can have tangible results, promote the necessary reforms, encourage regional integration and improve the living conditions of our citizens.

These 10 years were not easy. You are all aware of the many developments that occurred in our region during that time-frame – most of them, let’s face it, were quite negative.

But despite the difficulties, the UfM has proven its relevance as a regional platform – in terms of Ministerial Conferences, platforms for regional dialogue, labelled projects – and consolidated the cooperation and its efforts to enhance regional integration in many different areas, like Energy, Water, Urban Development, Blue Economy, Higher Education, Employment, Gender Equality and many more...

Managing to place itself in the center of the debate, in what regards the Euro-Mediterranean region.

That is why today, leading UN agencies – like UN Women, Habitat, UNDP, W.H.O. and many others – come to the UfM for advice on the implementation of the SDG’s in the Mediterranean region and support their cooperation projects;

Important international institutions, like the World Bank’s Center for Mediterranean Integration, OECD or OSCE, look for our help for the enactment of their cooperation efforts in the Mediterranean.

International Development agencies, like SIDA from Sweden, GiZ from Germany or the Cooperation agency from Norway have chosen to partner with the UfM in concrete initiatives and projects to promote Human development and Sustainable development in the region.

Even the European Commission, and this has to be highlighted because it might have a groundbreaking effect on our work, as it tries to introduce further coherence between the UfM and its bilateral efforts of cooperation, will be submitting for UfM

labelling a program of EU cooperation, for the evaluation and (hopefully) support of the 43 member-states.

Dear Members of the Parliamentary Assembly,

The theme of today's Plenary session is "The challenges of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean". I would like to commend President Tajani for choosing this theme. The peak of the migratory phenomena has receded in the last two years, but we still have people risking and losing their lives in trying to cross the Mediterranean, then we understand the importance of discussing the issues.

The UfM Secretariat has pushed for an internal debate on the subject – and also in other challenges facing the region – that culminated on the endorsement, by Ministers of Foreign Affairs of all 43 member-states of the "UfM Road-map for Action" in January 2017.

In it, they reiterated that "Migration" is an important part of their political dialogue within the framework of the UfM and that the UfM should be involved in relevant migration-related initiatives in the region in order to ensure the substantial and tangible contribution of the UfM activities to addressing this challenge.

Fortunately, many institutions have stepped up their activities to face the growing influx of migrants and refugees. Today we will have the opportunity to hear from two of the most important institutions dealing with the subject, the UNHCR and the IOM, whose efforts are, at all levels, commendable.

It is extremely important that migrants, and particularly refugees, can have immediate support when forced to flee their homes. Likewise, it is extremely important that countries most affected by this abnormal flow of refugees – and here I would like to single out the examples of Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt – may have the support they need to cope with the situation and avoid any social unrest.

But as important as this immediate support might be, we shouldn't lose track of the root causes that cause these migration movements. I'm not talking about armed-conflicts, of course. But many of these migration movements are linked to

economic and social factors, lack of development, social inequalities, environmental and climate change effects.

So, focusing on the improvement of the life conditions, on the education and formation of Youth and creating the conditions for a better inclusion in the work market, promoting the creation of more and better jobs, fomenting regional cooperation and economic integration through trade, and energy and transport networks, tackling the challenges of overpopulation of urban centers, all these elements are pivotal to a comprehensive approach to migrations.

Of course, focusing on the root causes will only bear fruits on the middle and long term. But as important as it might be to give immediate answers to today's challenges, we should all bear in mind that the only way to prevent even bigger problems in the future is to work towards guaranteeing that our Youth will be offered better perspectives, in healthier and wealthier socio-economic environments.

Notwithstanding, this approach does not exclude us from the international efforts to better understand the migrations phenomena and the best ways to address it.

This week, for example, and for the first time since the establishment of the UfM, I was very pleased to welcome in Barcelona on Monday and Tuesday the meeting of the Civil Protection Directors-General of the UfM. This is an area of the utmost importance when discussing the challenges of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean region, and I am really proud that we were successful in launching this platform for regional dialogue on such an important subject.

Last year, in 2018, the UfM secretariat supported the launching of the EuroMedMig-ReNet – the “Euro-Mediterranean network of research institutes on Migration”, to promote research, training, and knowledge transfer on the key current issues and main challenges connected with the migratory research agenda in the Mediterranean. This is an effort that we will continue to foster.

Likewise, we will continue to address migration issues related to

- . climate and environment, notably through our partnership with OSCE,
- . or the subject of rural migration with FAO and CIHEAM,

- . or through the development of the UfM Water Agenda, that created a Water, Employment and Migration (WEM) Task Force to focus on that nexus,
- . or the questions related to Women and Migration, as a follow up to the UfM's Regional Dialogue on Women,
- . or the important question of "Internationalization of Higher Education" and the importance to focus on migrant and refugee's educational needs.

These initiatives can only be successful with the full engagement of our member-states. And, in many cases, that engagement will be dependent of the introduction of reforms, also at a national level. And your support can be fundamental. We need our parliamentary dimension to be informed, to be active, to be supportive and to be a driving force for the introduction of reforms:

- . For the implementation of the UfM Water Agenda,
- . for the promotion of cleaner and more effective regional Energy networks,
- . for the definition of regional Transport networks that can promote trade and economic growth,
- . for the mobility of students and researchers,
- . for the adaptation of academic curricula to the new digital labor revolution.

Furthermore, we continue to promote Ministerial Conferences – and we will have an important meeting on Employment and Labor in Portugal in April, for instance – and we are fully engaged in our regional platforms – in more than a dozen different sectors, from digital economy to women's rights, from transports to employment – but our main goal is always to see the debates materialize into concrete projects of cooperation that can benefit our peoples.

Your role is extraordinarily important, and your participation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM comes with the responsibility of mobilizing and ensuring our Member-States commitment to the development of regional integration between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

Dear Members,

Dear Representative of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey,

I would like to conclude with a special word to the upcoming Turkish Presidency of the PA-UfM. You can always count on the Secretariat of the UfM, with our active presence in your meetings, with our support and engagement in the strengthening of our partnership.

We will be looking forward working with you, and also with the new Permanent Secretariat of the PA-UfM that you will be establishing in Rome.

The development of the UfM depends on our collective efforts, on our ability to overcome our differences through dialogue and our engagement to the promotion of cooperation and socio-economic growth in the Euro-Mediterranean region. We share the challenges. And if we want to address them effectively, we must also share the answers.

Thank you very much,