



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

Welcoming words of the UfM Secretary General Mr. Nasser Kamel

EMUNI-UfM Conference

**“Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications:
Where does the Euro-Mediterranean region stands?”**

Barcelona, 12 April 2019

Minister Pikalo,
Rectors and Presidents of Universities,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Pedralbes Palace, headquarters of the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, and a home to all Euro-Mediterranean countries, and the whole community of actors dedicated to fostering regional cooperation and mutual understanding in the Mediterranean.

Allow me to start by thanking the representatives of our Member States, namely; H.E. Minister Jernej Pikalo, the Slovenian Minister of education, science and sport for honoring us with his presence, as well as Ambassador Abdel-Rahim al-Farra, the Palestinian Ambassador to the European Union and the Senior official of Palestine at the UfM. Both countries have always been strongly engaged in our action and development.

Moreover, I would like to convey a warm welcome and cordial greeting to my dear friend, Professor Mustapha Bousmina, President of the Euro-Mediterranean University in Fez. Professor Bousmina's vision and dedication have greatly contributed to the establishment of a pioneer academic institution and a center of excellence that seeks to develop capacities and to foster mutual understanding in the Mediterranean.

I also find it fitting to convey my gratitude to our long-standing partners from the EMUNI Euro-Mediterranean University, particularly my dear friend Professor Hamid El-Zoheiry, for his dedication and active engagement in bringing talents, knowledge and skills from the Mediterranean closer. This conference focuses on the state of play of higher education diplomas' recognition in the Euro-Mediterranean region which lies at the heart of the annual work programme of the UfM Secretariat for 2019, and constitutes part of a parcel in our holistic approach to dealing with youth challenges in our region.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

While the UfM countries have the most talented and educated pool of young men and women, they experience the highest level of unemployment among higher education graduates in the world, with women being particularly affected. Impact studies within the EU have shown how international experience such as Erasmus can help students become more employable, and this is an additional reason for promoting a greater comparability of diplomas and degrees across the whole Euro-Mediterranean region.

Beneath the surface, the commonalities that unite us far exceed the differences that separate us. At the end, we all share a keen interest in investing in our young people by providing quality education and decent jobs for all.

This is what our Member States strongly reasserted last week in Cascais, Portugal during the fourth Ministerial Conference on Employment and Labour, which has given a new impulse to social and economic integration in the Euro-Mediterranean region. UfM Ministers have agreed on four priorities of action to further focus their efforts on, including investing in quality education and training systems.

Given the diverse challenges that we face in our region, the Union for the Mediterranean has opted for a positive, action-oriented agenda, and to work in close collaboration with others through a multi-stakeholders' approach that emphasizes synergies and complementarities. Through the UfM regional cooperation framework, we have created Euro-Mediterranean Universities to educate a new generation of young people with a unique Euro-Mediterranean vision.

With over 30 million people enrolled as students in the region, we also need to jointly work towards facilitating cross-border academic mobility opportunities to generate enough momentum to establishing a shared Euro-Mediterranean mindset and identity among our students.

As you are well aware, a prerequisite for further increases in student mobility is to ensure comparability across higher education systems and transferability of acquired qualifications. Our region is amongst the most diverse in the world and our higher education systems are no exception. Let's take this unique diversity as part of our richness, and perceive it as an opportunity, and not a challenge. An opportunity for our youth to experience different teaching and learning approaches; an opportunity to enhance intercultural dialogue and the circulation of knowledge; and an opportunity to build academic excellence.

Isolated national policies are no longer sufficient in tackling the common challenge of recognizing foreign higher education qualifications. A well-coordinated regional approach is therefore essential to ensure that our efforts meet the real needs of the students, as well as their families, higher education institutions, employers, and society in general, while avoiding the duplication of efforts.

As regional cooperation and dialogue are at the heart of UfM activities, I would like to express our great pleasure to co-organize and host this conference at the UfM Secretariat.

Today, we get a chance to reflect on the ambition of establishing a common Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education Area. And while we realize that we will not be able resolve all the issues pertaining to the recognition of foreign diplomas through this conference, we look forward to catalyzing an active exchange on best practices, and a fruitful discussion on ongoing initiatives in order to chart concrete pathways for progress and action in this domain.

Finally, I wish you all a productive conference, and I avail myself of this opportunity to stress that the UfM Secretariat will endeavor to ensure the best possible follow-up on the recommendations of this conference based on your discussions.

Thank you very much.