



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

Speech of the UfM Secretary General

Mr. Nasser Kamel

Side-event of the UfM Ministerial Conference of Employment and Labour

“The employment of Mediterranean university graduates: Bridging the employability gap between advanced skills and markets”

Cascais – 1 April 2019

Dear Secretary General of CIHEAM,

Dear Vice-President of the FCT,

Dear colleagues,

Your Excellences,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to welcome you to this beautiful city of Cascais and to the 4th Union for the Mediterranean Ministerial on Employment and Labor, that we are quickstarting today with this important side-event on **“The employment of Mediterranean university graduates: Bridging the employability gap between advanced skills and markets”**.

I would like to thank our partners, who have been pivotal in ensuring its success, German economic cooperation **GIZ, CIHEAM and the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT)**.

We are particularly honored by the presence here of the Secretary General of CIHEAM, my dear friend Placido Plaza, and the Vice-President of FCT, Mrs. Ana Sanchez.

We'd also like to acknowledge the support of the European Commission and the extraordinary hospitality of Portuguese authorities to the Ministerial Conference.

We are meeting today to discuss a fundamental issue, that constitutes a challenge to the stability and the fulfilment of the economic potential of both shores of the Mediterranean: the scourge of graduate's unemployment in the Mediterranean region, and the collective answers that must be given to mitigate and overcome this shortcoming.

As you well know, this constitutes a serious problem in the countries of Europe.

Notwithstanding, it is in the South Mediterranean that the situation is particularly harsh, and we can find levels of unemployment among higher education graduates that are the highest in the world, reaching in some cases 25%.

This obviously damages the perspectives of a better future for the Mediterranean youth, as it hampers their professional and social development.

Also, and this is worrying to our countries and their development, it risks wasting the huge economic potential that the brightest young minds in the Mediterranean could bring around.

Graduates, PhDs and Researchers have a key role to play in creating sustainable and inclusive economic growth in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Our countries need their contribution to foster economic growth in the region. And they deserve to be given the opportunity to give that contribution.

These young women and men are the best generation we ever had, in terms of education and skills.

They are determined to create their own jobs, they are dynamic, innovative, bursting with creativity, fully adapted to this new Economy 4.0.

They will launch new start-ups, develop them into major companies, be in the forefront of the ongoing digital revolution.

This is why we have decided to meet with the “future builders”: universities and their networks, civil society organizations, government institutions, public and private companies, business angels and start-up incubators and accelerators, development cooperation agencies and the scientific community at large.

All of those working for better job opportunities to our Mediterranean youth.

At the Union for the Mediterranean we believe that we must work for and with our youth. They should not only be a topic for discussions. They have to be involved in those discussions, namely if we want to be successful in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Mediterranean. They are the greatest agents for positive change.

This is why we are meeting here today but we are also organizing a **UfM Youth Forum** in Barcelona on the 22-23 May and we will be bringing more and more Youth associations to our processes of **Regional Dialogue** in thematic as different as Women Empowerment or Energy Transition and Climate Action.

And we are strongly engaged in promoting regional mobility among students and researchers, through an ongoing regional dialogue on “**Higher Education Internationalization and Academic Mobility**” and a big “**UfM Mobility Week**” that will take place in October.

And furthermore, the Union for the Mediterranean is supporting different projects of regional relevance that help graduates in very concrete ways.

Like for instance, the project **HOMERe**, that is also here today.

It is one of the success stories of our comprehensive **Med4Jobs initiative**, that support different projects that address vocational and professional training, higher education, research, internships and job creation, job intermediation, support to SME’s and business development, in a full cycle that can contribute to bridge the

gaps and guarantee that our young women and men receive the skills that are needed by the markets – for instance, we have a special focus on sectors like **engineerings, environment, agricultural sciences, ITC or blue economy** – and allow me to also acknowledge the presence of a representative of the **Blueskills project**, an important initiative that just received UfM label, the support of our 43 Member-States, last week in Brussels -, because studies show that those are the areas where demand for qualified workers will increase the most in coming years. This was recognized by the **Valletta Ministerial Declaration for Strengthening Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation through Research and Innovation**, that we organized in 2017.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We believe that our region offers an incredible potential for synergies, as we can see for instance in the PRIMA initiative.

But we need to step up discussions for identifying more joint initiatives, to deepen our dialogue mechanisms and identify more projects that can support our Youth in their transition from universities to job markets, our Universities in the complementarity between their research efforts and the market demands and our Companies in their needs to promote R&D through a stronger investment and cooperation with existing research centers.

Our objective is to take your practical recommendations and advance them to the development of concrete ideas for follow-up, involving the 43 Member States of the Union for the Mediterranean.

We owe it to the more than 33 million university students in the UfM region. Their success is paramount to our collective success, as societies, as countries and as region.

Thank you very much, I wish you all a fruitful discussion.