



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

Speech of the UfM Secretary General Mr. Nasser Kamel

UfM Ministerial Policy Conference *“Jobs, Skills and Opportunities for All”*

Cascais, 2 April, 2019

Dear Co-Presidents,
Distinguished Ministers and Heads of Delegations,
Excellencies,

First of all, I would like to welcome all of you to this UfM Ministerial Policy Conference on "Jobs, Skills, and Opportunities for All." We are honored today by the presence of H.E. António Costa, Prime Minister of Portugal, to whom I would like to express our appreciation for Portuguese hospitality and strong engagement in UfM activities.

I would also like to thank H.E. Mr. José António Vieira da Silva, Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security of Portugal for the exemplary organization of this conference.

Moreover, I would like to extend my gratitude to Her Excellency Marianne Thyssen, European Union Commissioner in charge of Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, as well as H.E. Mr. Samir Said Murad, Minister of Labor of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, for supporting this timely Policy Conference that addresses one of the foremost challenges in the region and aims to identify future **pathways towards inclusive and sustainable labour markets**.

Ahead of tomorrow's UfM Ministerial Meeting dedicated to Employment and Labour, I am very pleased to see that the title of the Policy Conference cites **opportunities for all**, because despite the multitude of challenges that we face in the Euro-Mediterranean region, we choose to aspire for a positive change and be its first agents through our continued pragmatic and multi-stakeholder approach as we contribute to fulfilling the legitimate expectations of our peoples.

There are several **reasons for this optimism**: our region is one of huge geostrategic importance; it is rich in natural resources, human capital, cultural assets, business culture, as well as evident synergies and complementarities.

It is not lacking in success stories, skill pools or creative solutions for employment-related issues.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is now one of the essential topics in all business fora and employment debates being perceived by some as a promise for smart solutions, while seen by others as a menace heralding job loss and disruption.

At the UfM, we strongly believe that the Mediterranean that invented the souq, the bazaar and the piazza, is never a stranger to innovation and entrepreneurship.

We have always believed that **the greatest asset of this region is its resilience and its capacity to reinvent itself** to navigate high waters. Indeed, we have endured economic crises, political turmoil, social unrest.

Our recovery has always been possible –in no small part- thanks to the resilience, the creativity and the solidarity of our peoples and our countries in the region.

To illustrate, **the World Bank projects growth in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to rebound to an average of 2% in 2018, up from an average 1.4% in 2017, and projects the growth to reach an average of 2.8% by the end of 2020.**

It is worth noting that this positive outlook comes in the midst of a high tide of political conflicts in the region.

Beyond the usual statistics and metrics that stress the high unemployment rates and labour market disparities across the region, let me share with you some facts and figures to support this optimism.

Last year, **the World Economic Forum's Technology Pioneers cohort brought together 61 early-stage companies from around the world that are pioneering new technologies and innovations.**

26% out of those, came from the UfM Region, which is uniquely positioned to develop a solid entrepreneurship environment in which start-ups can thrive.

The World Economic Forum's Human Capital Index indicates that **the MENA region currently captures only 62% of its full human capital potential**, which translates to a great margin for improvement should the bottlenecks of informality, skill gaps and access to market and to finance be addressed properly.

Significant legal reforms and conducive policy actions are underway in several MENA countries to **tackle the enduring gender gap** and a new impetus is paving the way for **higher women participation** in the labour market.

Having that said, we are certainly **aware of the enormous task that we have ahead of us**, and of the dire need for mobilizing all the stakeholders to devise an orchestrated regional response to the employment challenge that has been straining the social and economic fabric of the Euro-Mediterranean region and impeding the region from **running at its full economic carrying capacity** towards realizing the growth rates that, otherwise, it would be capable of generating.

The region's **position on the global value chain and its location on the competitiveness scale** are largely a function of its ability to turn labour market challenges into opportunities through policy reforms, capacity building, social dialogue, gender mainstreaming, innovation streamlining, strategic partnerships, and creative financial solutions, just to name a few of the many elements that constitute an **enabling business environment and a functioning labour market**.

Today's sessions will tackle a broad range of interrelated thematic including job creation, building synergies, inclusion and skills development.

These are all areas that lie at the very heart of our UfM efforts, and the Secretariat has been actively engaged through its role as platform of dialogue, a vehicle for building political consensus and a supporter of regional projects that emphasize employment, socio-economic empowerment of women and youth, supporting SMEs and promoting employability in the region.

This year, **the UfM Secretariat is reaching out to even more stakeholders from around the region, and taking its business development and employment fora to new countries**, leveraging on the vast expertise and know-how in the region.

We look forward to the discussions that will be held throughout the breakout sessions that will follow today.

I wish you all very fruitful and inspiring exchange of ideas, views and experiences, and I thank the Government of Portugal again for hosting the UfM Ministerial Conference here in Cascais.

Thank you.
