



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

Speech of the UfM Secretary General

“EU Med means Business – Shaping the Future of Entrepreneurship in the South!”

Brussels, 21-22 May 2019

Dear Commissioner Hahn,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the Commissioner and all the members of DG NEAR for inviting me to take part in this “EU Med means Business”, which I consider as a legacy event for the Commissioner and DG NEAR.

This invitation marks the continuation of the EU's genuine endeavors to actively involve the UfM Secretariat in supporting its efforts towards fostering job creation and economic growth in the Southern Mediterranean.

Furthermore, please allow me to applaud the continuous commitment of the European Commission to promoting job creation, boosting employability, and cultivating a culture of entrepreneurship as a prerequisite for economic development and inclusive growth in the MENA region.

In this regard, I would like to commend the dynamic role and diligent efforts of Commissioner Hahn himself and also his vision, pragmatism, and ability to comprehend the particularities of our region that have enabled him to build bridges across the Mediterranean; bridges that were strong enough to respond to, and endure, the substantial challenges that the Euro-Mediterranean region, and cooperation, have gone through over the past few years.

Indeed, Commissioner Hahn has also been an avid supporter of the UfM Secretariat's efforts towards targeting youth and women and addressing employment-related challenges in the Euro-Mediterranean region over the course of his tenure.

More recently, for instance, we've had the pleasure and honor to hold the UfM First Med4Jobs Stakeholders' Dialogue with his valuable input and direct support.

Excellency,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During that Forum, the Commissioner recalled that *"Jobs and youth were at the heart of his agenda for the southern neighborhood."*

The considerable grant portfolio that was allocated for supporting work in this pivotal area with projects to facilitate entrepreneurship, develop SMEs, promote trade and investment, and improve the regulatory environment for business, do confirm the willingness of the EU to address this priority as a matter of utmost importance.

In many ways, the Commissioner's legacy and that of DG NEAR during this period was both influential and inspiring.

But even the most inspiring page has to be turned, and yet, in doing so, there is always a certainty that the pages that follow will mark a continuation of a legacy that will indeed endure.

For my part, I would like to reassure you that, at the UfM, the legacy of those years will reinforce our determination on fulfilling the overarching goal of creating an area of peace, stability, security and prosperity for our peoples.

At the UfM Secretariat, we consider youth and women remain among our main target groups and beneficiaries as we work on addressing the root causes of some of the most pressing issues in the region.

Entrepreneurship is of particular importance to unlocking the creative potential of younger people and encouraging smart and creative solutions and business models that are functional, sustainable and resilient.

Beyond the conventional view of entrepreneurship, we are well aware that for it to yield its full fruits, and not just the low-hanging fruits, there are systemic prerequisites.

This includes a harmonious ensemble comprising a conducive regulatory framework, a robust financial market, a technologically-adept educational system, among other tenants of an enabling business environment.

Through the support of the co-presidency and our Member States, the UfM Secretariat has been instrumental in addressing these dimensions, and one perfect example would be the UfM Med4Jobs which is a flagship initiative that presents an

integrated and cross-sectoral approach that covers both the supply and demand side of the labour market, by targeting three core issues, namely employability, job intermediation, and developing business enabling infrastructures for MSMEs, including incubators and mentoring programmes.

Moreover, we have become convinced, more than ever, that it is pivotal to harmonize and coordinate all regional efforts to tackle Mediterranean challenges in a global setting that has become more connected than ever, and in a region that has suffered economic crises, political and social unrest, and technological disruptions.

10 years following the establishment of the UfM, our experience attests to such hypothesis, and shows that the true currency of political will is concrete action with tangible results on the ground.

Without further ado, I wish you a successful handover of recommendations tomorrow.

I trust that the work concluded today by the working groups will yield solid recommendations based on several enticing discussions.

In this regard, I assure you that the UfM Secretariat stands ready to promote these recommendations and support their implementation by bringing them into all our regular fora and dialogue platforms, starting with the upcoming UfM Business Forum taking place in Cairo this June, and at the UfM Working Group on Industrial Cooperation in Brussels also this June, as well as the next UfM Ministerial Meeting on Trade.

My dear,

Last but not least, I would like to wish Commissioner Hahn a fruitful new stage in an already outstanding career, with the full certainty that he would bring an exceptional added value, both professionally and personally, to whichever position he would assume in the future.

Thank you all for your attention.