



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

Opening Speech by the UfM Secretary General Mr. Nasser Kamel

UfM Business Forum

Cairo, Egypt – 18 June 2019

السادة الوزراء،

السيدات والسادة،

بداية، اسمحوا لي أن أرحب بكم في مدينة الألف عام، مدينة القاهرة، والتي تحتضن هذا المنتدى الهام، وأن أتقدم بالشكر لوزارة التجارة والصناعة المصرية لاستضافتها لمنتدى الأعمال الخاص بالاتحاد من أجل المتوسط.

كذلك، فأود أن أتقدم بالشكر لشركائنا في هذا الحدث الذي نوليه قدراً وثيراً من الاهتمام، وتحديداً، المؤسسة الألمانية للتعاون الدولي بتكليف من الوزارة الاتحادية الألمانية للتعاون الاقتصادي والتنمية، وكذلك جمعية غرف التجارة والصناعة للبحر الأبيض المتوسط.

ولتسمحوا لي الآن أن أستكمل خطابي باللغة الإنجليزية.

Excellencies,

Dear Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, please allow me to thank the Ministry of Trade and Industry of Egypt for hosting this Forum, and to extend my gratitude to our partners, GIZ which is commissioned by the German Federal Ministry

for Economic Co-operation (BMZ), and ASCAME, the Association of Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

I am both pleased and honored to welcome you to the UfM Business Forum here in Cairo, an event that corresponds to the ministerial mandate tasked to us by the UfM Ministers of Trade, and that marks a remarkable milestone for the Union for the Mediterranean, being **the most prominent UfM Forum fully dedicated to Trade since the inception of the UfM** back in 2008.

Please allow me to **inject a measure of UfM realism into the Trade narrative** in the region: trade and investment hold the key to unlocking one of the most drastic economic realities in the Euro-Mediterranean region, namely the fragmentation and the meagre level of regional economic integration, which rank among the lowest in the world.

Figures can speak volumes, and this is why I will share one figure with you: Only 1% of the overall trade flows in the Euro-Mediterranean Region takes place between non-EU Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries.

The story behind the figure is easy to read: **the MENA Region is still punching way below its geostrategic weight and remains far from realizing its full economic potential.**

Much has been said about different modalities of development cooperation, and the UfM Secretariat has been actively engaged in both South-South and Triangular Cooperation, **with the Agadir Agreement being one promising example that we stand fully committed to support**, but more dismal clocks are ticking for our region: the Fourth Industrial Revolution and its disruptive technologies, the mercantilist approach to trade by some major powers, the spill-over effect of trade frictions on the global arena, and the rise of new blocks are just a few of

the challenges, but we have all learned our lesson well in the region: regional challenges call for regional responses, and this is where the UfM steps in to broker solutions for complex situations and to offer an enriched platform of dialogue to forge consensus among stakeholders and beneficiaries, building on the very tenants that made the Mediterranean a cradle of civilizations: I am referring to dialogue, exchange, solidarity and a capacity to spot and develop meaningful and long-lasting synergies and complementarities.

The Mediterranean that gave birth to the bazaar and the piazza; the Mediterranean where the Silk Road, the Spice Trail and the Frankincense Route all converged; the Mediterranean where the wealth of the world once poured and accumulated in the thrifty port cities and markets of Alexandria, Venice, Dubrovnik and Valencia has what it takes to assume its position again at the center stage of global trade, and it all starts with intra-regional trade facilitation and promotion.

With this thought, I wish you all fruitful discussions today, and I look forward to action-oriented recommendations and inspiring success stories and best practices that correspond to the quality of the panelists and participants in this timely Forum which marks the beginning of a structured UfM effort aiming at promoting the Trade portfolio in the region towards the realization of our mission of promoting regional integration and cooperation.