

**XV Annual Conference of the Mediterranean Commission of the European
League for Economic Co-Operation -ELEC-**

Promoting Blue Tourism in the Mediterranean

Palma de Mallorca, 30-31 October 2019

**Opening remarks by the UfM Secretary General
Mr. Nasser Kamel**

Dear Presidents,
Dear Director-General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is such a pleasure to be once again among fellow Mediterranean enthusiasts, gathered by the Mediterranean Commission of the European League for Economic Co-Operation, one year after our last *rendez-vous* in Tarragona.

Allow me at the outset to thank our long-standing partners, our close collaborators and friends of IEMed (the European Institute of the Mediterranean) for the vibrant dynamism they bring to the field of Mediterranean affairs, under the great leadership of Ambassador Senén Florensa.

The choice of thematic for this Annual Conference is once again very timely, and I would like to warmly commend you for that.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, I would like to touch briefly on three interrelated issues, namely the scale of the climate challenge we are facing and its effect on Tourism, the opportunities offered by Blue Economy, and the ongoing UfM efforts to coordinate a regional response to climate change in the region.

As you well know, we have been facing an unprecedented and persistent climate change throughout our region.

Life and livelihood as we know them are under threat, and we need to work together, at every level, to tackle this immense challenge that cannot be possibly handled by any one country or any one organization on its own.

It is the geographic position of the Mediterranean Basin, between the Azores and the African anticyclones, that gave birth to a “climate exception”; a climate predictability that allowed for the agricultural revolution, the shift to a sedentary life style, the rise of the first cities, and consequently, the flourishing of human civilizations.

It is therefore our unique climate that allowed such growth and expansion of Mediterranean cultures and societies.

And earlier this month, we had the demonstration that our climate exception is facing an existential threat. It is particularly fitting to be discussing this here, in the beautiful city of Palma de Mallorca, at the heart of the Balearic Islands.

Indeed, just a few days ago, the islands experienced the most intense rains of the “gota fria” that hit the Eastern coast of Spain, a phenomenon that normally takes place with the arrival of autumn. But this was the third *gota fria* of the year since August, and we will see more and more with the changing weather patterns that are occurring throughout our beloved Mare Nostrum.

This is what was notably demonstrated by the first-ever study on environmental and climate change impacts in the Mediterranean Basin, presented on the margins of the fourth UfM Regional Forum, in the presence of Ministers and High-Level Delegations from our 43 Member States.

The results are alarming to say the least, and I would like to share with you some figures, that are pointing towards tough times to come:

- The Mediterranean region has warmed up by 1.5°C since pre-industrial times, 20% faster than the global average. Without additional mitigation measures, regional rising temperatures will imply more significant and longer lasting heat waves.
- By 2050, Mediterranean cities will also account for half of the 20 global cities with the highest annual damages from sea level rises, impacting one third of the region’s population in coastal areas.
- Furthermore, the average maximum body weight of fish is expected to shrink by up to almost 50% by 2050, and the quality of several crops will decline as the plants cycle is becoming shorter.

In sum, *Ladies and Gentlemen*, one of the major factors that make our Mediterranean region so attractive for hundreds of millions of tourists every year is under great threat.

Another study conducted last year by the UfM Secretariat on the impacts of climate change on tourism, gives us clear indications of the disruptive repercussions of this climate volatility on this specific sector. It shows for example, that in countries where diving tourism depends on local ecosystem assets, such as coral reefs in Egypt, the expected rising water temperature is already leading to the bleaching of such asset, reducing the sector's attractiveness for many international visitors.

In light of all these indicators, the Blue economy approach focused on sustainable tourism and on placing a price tag on our habitats is more than ever needed. It can help preserve the local identity and physical integrity of coastal cities, preserve landscapes and biodiversity, reduce water and air pollution as well as the pressure on natural resources.

A sustainable use of the sea could also generate unprecedented development and create additional, better paid jobs.

Indeed, according to OECD projections, by 2030, the Blue Economy could also outperform the growth of the global economy as a whole.

Coastal tourism, as the crown jewel for our countries for its capacity to create employment and wealth, must therefore be tackled through a blue economy approach: namely "blue tourism".

The Union for the Mediterranean has been at the forefront of the policy debate on this matter since the UfM Ministerial Conference on Blue Economy, held in November 2015 in Brussels.

UfM Ministers settled, back then, the existing long-term objectives for sustainable management of the sea and for a cleaner Mediterranean, acknowledging the need to invest on Blue research, technology, innovation, knowledge and skills. Building on this mandate, a number of policy initiatives have been actively supported by the UfM, jointly with relevant international institutions including the UN and the EU.

Amongst those, we count the BLUEMED initiative, supporting research and innovation, Med4Jobs, fostering employment and creating job opportunities in the maritime and marine sectors, the recent WestMED Initiative, promoted by the EU and supported by the UfM Secretariat to achieve greater cooperation across the region and the SWITCHMED, an initiative that supports and connects stakeholders to scale up social and eco innovations in the Mediterranean.

Moreover, we have given a special focus to blue tourism by adding “Med Coasts for Blue Growth (MedCoast4BG)” to our labelled projects portfolio in December 2017. The project will mainly contribute to establishing common approaches and planning tools to boost sustainable coastal and maritime tourism in the Mediterranean, taking into account common (at Mediterranean level) but also diverse (at local level) natural, physical and geographic characteristics.

We look forward to paving the way with all the Mediterranean Blue Economy stakeholders towards the next Ministerial Conference, to be held next year in Malta.

Let us build together stronger partnerships for a more resilient Mare Nostrum, because more than any other time, on the conduct of each depends the fate of all.

Thank you very much.