



Towards a Renewed Strategic Agenda for Cooperation on Higher Education and Research in the Mediterranean

3rd UNESCO World Higher Education Conference – UfM Side-Event
Barcelona, 19 May 2022, 17:00 – 21:30

The 3rd UNESCO World Higher Education Conference UfM Side Event aims at exploring the Euro-Mediterranean regional priorities on higher education and research through a debate between relevant academic stakeholders and representatives from the UfM Ministries of Higher Education.

17.00 – 17.30 **Welcome & Opening Remarks**

- **Nasser Kamel**, Secretary General, Union for the Mediterranean.
- **Filip Van Depoele**, Deputy Director and Head of the International Cooperation Unit, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC), European Commission; UfM Co-Presidency
- **Hussam Khasawneh**, Assistant Secretary General, The Higher Council for Science and Technology of Jordan; UfM Co-Presidency
- **Manuel Bouard**, Deputy Delegate for European and International Affairs, Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation, France; Presidency of the EU Council
- **Josep M. Vilalta**, Director, Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi)
- **Peter Wells**, Chief Higher Education Representative, UNESCO

17.30 – 18.20 **Session 1: Advancing the Internationalization of Higher Education in the Mediterranean**

- *Reinforcing regional mobility schemes, including South-South.*
- *Developing internationalization at home in the Southern Mediterranean countries.*
- *Enhancing e-learning, virtual exchanges, digitalization, and teaching innovation.*
- *Brain drain/circulation and diaspora engagement.*

Moderator: **Giulia Marchesini**, Center for Mediterranean Integration (CMI/UNOPS)

- **Filip Van Depoele**, Deputy Director and Head of the International Cooperation Unit, Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC), European Commission
– *Presentation of the new Erasmus+ programme*
- **Marcello Scalisi**, Director, Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED)
– *Presentation of the UfM Report*
- **Abdelhamid El-Zoheiry**, President, Euro-Mediterranean University (EMUNI)
- **Amr Salama**, Secretary General, Association of Arab Universities (AAU)

Open Debate



18.20 – 18.55 **Session 2: Improving Higher Education Governance**

- *Developing enabling environments for international cooperation: financial autonomy, quality assurance, recognition of qualifications, information.*
- *Building capacities for international cooperation at institutional and at national level.*

Moderator: **João Lobo**, Union for the Mediterranean

- **Francisco Marmolejo**, Higher Education President & Education Advisor, Qatar Foundation
- **Naouel Abdellatif Mami**, Vice-Rector for External Relations, Université Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Sétif 2, Algeria
- **Giorgio Marinoni**, Manager of Higher Education and Internationalization, International Association of Universities (IAU)

Open Debate

18.55 – 19.30 **Session 3: Enhancing the Role of Higher Education Systems and Institutions in addressing Youth Employability**

- *Developing the students' employability and entrepreneurship skills.*
- *Improving university-business collaboration.*
- *Matching skills and labour market needs and reducing school-to-work transition period.*

Moderator: **Giuseppe Provenzano**, Union for the Mediterranean

- **Olfa Zéribi**, Director for Western Europe, Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF)
- **Hussam Khasawneh**, Assistant Secretary General, The Higher Council for Science and Technology of Jordan

Open Debate

19.30 – 19.55 **Wrap-up, Next Steps & Conclusions**

- **Mauve Carbonell**, President, Téthys Consortium of Euro-Mediterranean Universities – *Rapporteur Session 1*
- **Ghada Bouhlal**, Director of Socio-economic partnerships and Entrepreneurship, Euromed University of Fes – *Rapporteur Session 2*
- **Silvia Marchionne**, Project Manager, UNIMED - Mediterranean Universities Union - *Rapporteur Session 3*
- **Itaf Ben Abdallah**, Senior Advisor for Higher Education and Research, Union for the Mediterranean

20.00 – 21.30 **Networking Cocktail**

Working languages: English, French and Arabic. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided.



Since its creation in 2008, Higher Education and Research is one of the main priorities of the Union for the Mediterranean. Dialogue in this area has progressed since then around three main axes: academic mobility, employability and quality of education, and cooperation through university networks. This regional dialogue involves the UfM Member States, the EU, and key relevant actors and stakeholders: higher education institutions (HEIs), universities' networks, student networks, research centres. Its objective is to build a common vision on university cooperation and academic mobility within the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Developing effective science-policy interfaces between HEIs and policymakers is crucial to facilitate informed decision-making on current and future challenges in the region: addressing skills mismatches, youth unemployment and brain drain; fostering partnerships, academic mobility and the recognition of qualifications; improving shared knowledge on internationalisation trends and policies; facilitating continuous peer learning on policies and practices addressing common challenges and priorities; and fostering the implementation of joint projects and initiatives.

The last UfM Regional Dialogue Meeting took place in Cairo, Egypt, in December 2019, and stressed the need to consolidate comprehensive data on the internationalisation of higher education across the UfM region. A [Report on the Internationalization of Higher Education in the Mediterranean](#) was then commissioned by the UfM Secretariat to UNIMED, the Mediterranean Universities Union, which was published in June 2021 and presents a detailed context analysis complemented by a wide range of inspiring and scalable practices; it offers also an overview of the role played by regional organisations in providing opportunities, creating synergies, and making resources available for HEIs in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, country-specific recommendations were designed to address national challenges, and a number of common themes for the Euro-Mediterranean region were also identified, in relation to which additional recommendations were made.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the value-added of cooperation among universities, especially through the existing regional networks (e.g., UNIMED, Téthys, EMUNI). These interactions have improved their resilience, quality, and attractiveness. Through an informal consultation, the UfM Secretariat obtained confirmation on the necessity of convening a new ministerial meeting.

The last Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Declaration on Higher Education and Research aspired towards the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education and Research Area. Almost 15 years have passed since then, establishing the necessity to rethink the needs and goals of higher education against current challenges and opportunities.

A renewed regional strategic agenda for cooperation on Higher Education and Research could be a powerful tool to give guidance to both policymakers and institutions. It could acknowledge the achievements and developments of the past 15 years and affirm new commitments on the strategic importance of education, research and innovation for the development of human capital in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The process leading to a renewed regional strategic agenda on higher education should take the time necessary to listen to the voices of all the stakeholders involved in the sector. The UfM Report on the Internationalisation of Higher Education in the Mediterranean and its recommendations can be a good entry point to start prioritizing certain areas and topics.

The launch of the new Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe programmes, as well as the publication of the [New Agenda for the Mediterranean](#) (February 2021) as a Joint Communication of the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the recent [Communication](#) (January 2022) from the Commission on a European strategy for universities, offer considerable momentum to start establishing a renewed strategic agenda for cooperation on higher education and research in the Mediterranean.