

Tangible impacts on the region's citizens

Union for the Mediterranean, a close cooperation in civil protection

Interview with Ambassador Dr John Paul Grech,
Deputy Secretary General, Social & Civil Affairs,
Union for the Mediterranean, Barcelona

Hartmut Bühl: *Ambassador Grech, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is an intergovernmental Euro-Mediterranean organisation aimed at contributing to regional stability, human development and integration: what is the added value of the UfM to security and stability?*

John Paul Grech: The UfM was created in 2008. It is a unique inter-governmental organisation, bringing together 43 countries on an equal footing. These consist of the EU Member States and 16 countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (see box). The main added value of the UfM lies in the interrelation created between the policy dimension and its operational translation into concrete activities, projects and initiatives, with tangible impacts on the region's citizens.

Nannette Cazaubon: *You are the Deputy Secretary General of the UfM in charge of Social and Civil Affairs, which includes civil protection. How is your work linked to the European Union's efforts in managing disasters and crises?*

John Paul Grech: We cooperate closely with the European Commission, in particular with the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO). The UfM's engagement with DG ECHO serves as a link and relay to promote, amplify and support the EU's cooperation strategy towards the countries of the south and vice versa.

Nannette Cazaubon: *Is there any common programme?*

John Paul Grech: The EU-funded flagship programme for civil protection in the Euro-Mediterranean region is the PPRD South (Prevention, Preparedness and Response to natural and man-made Disasters in EU Southern Neighbourhood countries). Since January 2023, it has entered its fourth phase since its creation in 2009. In this new variation, it is called PPRD Med (2022-2025).



“I remain impressed by the strong convening power which the organisation has developed over the years.”

Ambassador John Paul Grech

Hartmut Bühl: *What are the priorities and the countries involved, and how does the UfM contribute to PPRD Med?*

John Paul Grech: This new phase will focus on new technology as well as the strengthening of regional and sub-regional cooperation. It concerns ten partner countries in the South (Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and Palestine). The UfM brings visibility and expertise, as well as political support to the project.

Nannette Cazaubon: *Let me ask you for more details about the organisation of the UfM. How is the political dimension structured and the regional cooperation organised?*

John Paul Grech: The specific instrument behind the whole UfM rationale are the regional dialogue platforms. These aim to establish exchange networks between countries, institutions and civil society, through thematic activities emanating from the mandate of the organisation. These dialogue platforms meet periodically, in stages, supported by working groups which feed into their reflections. The platforms give life to new ideas, initiatives and projects that are taken up by countries or

other entities, with a view to developing and conducting road-maps that fit into the UfM's established priorities and which meet the expectations of its different partners.

Hartmut Bühl: *Bringing so many countries around the table is not easy to deal with. What are the challenges of this cooperation, and what are the areas where tangible progress has been made so far?*

John Paul Grech: The UfM works on the principle of consensus, meaning that projects and initiatives are only agreed once all member states have indicated their acceptance, via the adoption procedures provided by the UfM Senior Officials structure which meets on a regular basis. All business is conducted following approval through an agreed system involving a co-presidency, composed of the EU and representatives of the non-EU Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, a role currently undertaken by Jordan. I remain impressed by the strong convening power that the organisation has developed over the years and of the sense of ownership that all member states demonstrate in our day-to-day work. Today the UfM is an indispensable inter-governmental organisation to which the EU and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries alike refer within the context of implementing the New Agenda for the Mediterranean.

Nannette Cazaubon: *We have heard that the EU is launching several civil protection programmes in the Mediterranean this year. Can you tell us more about these programmes and how they will be linked to the objectives of the UfM?*

John Paul Grech: Indeed, the European Commission will launch several programmes this year:

1. As I already mentioned, a flagship programme entitled "Prevention, Preparedness and Response to natural and man-made disasters in the Mediterranean" (PPRD Med 2022-2025) led by the International Science & Technology Center (ISTC);
2. A multi-country study aiming at assessing major risks at national and regional levels 2023-2025 led by the Italian Civil Protection (DPC), and;
3. The deployment of technical On-Site Assistance (OSA 2023-2026), for which Colonel Major Mohamed Ataknit from the Tunisian Civil Protection has been appointed as senior regional expert. He is based in Tunis and will be supporting our cooperation for the next 3 years.

These actions will complement existing initiatives and tools from the European Union Civil Protection Mechanisms (UCPM). They aim at further supporting the regional cooperation and long-term partnership between the EU, Southern countries and the UfM.

Nannette Cazaubon: *From 5-7 June, a high-level event will be hosted by the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the Dipartimento de Protezione Civile in Rome, co-organised by DG ECHO and supported by the UfM General Secretariat. What is the focus of this meeting?*

John Paul Grech: This event will focus on three segments:

1. A high-level panel to exchange and share views on "Climate change, Civil protection and Human Security – Towards an efficient Euro-Mediterranean Cooperation".
2. The launch of the PPRD Med – which should provide information about the several civil protection regional programmes planned to take place in the Mediterranean.
3. The holding of the UfM 2nd Meeting of the Regional Dialogue Platform on Civil Protection which should provide an early assessment of the outcome of the three UfM Working Groups on Preparedness, Prevention and Response, which have taken place online over the past few months.

Hartmut Bühl: *What are your personnel expectations for this meeting and, more generally, for the future of EU-UfM collaboration?*

John Paul Grech: As a start, the high-level event should put a political spotlight on the nexus between climate change, human security and civil protection, particularly in the light of the increasing meteorological and climate catastrophes which the Euro-Mediterranean region is currently, and increasingly, experiencing, like the recent events in Emilia Romagna, Northern Algeria and Jordan among others, but whose incidence in the future, according to indications, is bound to increase. This should encourage countries in the region to start thinking seriously about regional initiatives concerning prevention and response, given that in the face of such experiences, it is now abundantly clear that no country can deal with them on its own. The two other segments of the three-tiered event are expected to propose possible solutions on how such challenges can be tackled through regional cooperation and mutual support.

Hartmut Bühl: *Ambassador Grech, we thank you for your openness and wish you success.*



The Union for the Mediterranean

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), created in 2008 (Barcelona Process) is an intergovernmental Euro-Mediterranean organisation bringing together the 27 EU Member States and 16 countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean*. The UfM provides a forum to enhance regional cooperation and dialogue, as well as the implementation of concrete projects and initiatives with tangible impact on the citizens of its member states. The permanent secretariat of the UfM was established in 2010 in Barcelona.

Web: <https://ufmsecretariat.org/>

*Albania, Algeria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Monaco, Montenegro, Morocco, Palestine, Syria (suspended in 2011), Tunisia, Türkiye; Libya has observer status in the UfM.

