Concept Note
High-Level Conference on Food industry for a sustainable food security
Towards more resilient regional supply chains and a more sustainable food industry

Cairo, 22 and 23 October 2023

Back in 2015, the whole world adopted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 2, which aims at reaching zero hunger by 2030. However, the number of people affected by food insecurity has continued to increase due to various factors, such as the effects of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic crisis.

Moreover, with Russia and Ukraine accounting for nearly 30% of the world's wheat exports and over 60% of sunflower oil global supplies, the war in Ukraine has provoked skyrocketing energy prices and staggering inflation rates around the world, as well as a disruption of supply chains, particularly in the food sector. The resulting food crisis greatly affects several countries in the Mediterranean region, notably on its Southern shores. Egypt for instance imports more than 60% of its wheat, over 80% of which comes from Russia and Ukraine.

Volatile prices and food shortages have already shown their negative socio-economic effects, including civil unrest particularly in developing countries. In fact, the ongoing crisis has laid bare such preexisting vulnerabilities and highlights the relevance of resilient and diversified regional food supply chains.

It also constitutes a real wake up call to review the architecture of the Food industry in the region, with a view to making supply chains more resilient and production more sustainable. According to FAO data for 2020, the Agri-food sector consumes 70% of fresh water and produces 30% of overall GHG emissions, while only 16% of the crops are destined to human consumption, while 72% are provided for livestock.
Given this fast-changing scenario, which directly impacts food security worldwide, the UfM Co-presidency Joint Statement adopted at the UfM Regional Forum held on 24th November 2022 called for “new arrangements for the production and supply of basic food products”. Moreover, the Final Declaration of the 31st Arab Summit held in Algiers in November 2022 emphasized the need to join efforts to consolidate the collective Arab capacities to address common challenges, including food security.

In this context, the UfM Secretariat and the League of Arab States, having agreed to collaborate in areas of common interest, such as sustainable economic development and regional integration, intend to hold a High-Level Conference on Food industry and food security, which will also be supported by the German Development Cooperation.

This important event aims at bringing together high-level speakers to shed light on relevant topics according to the following axes:

- State of play of Food industry in the region (Demand and supply, support to the Food industry, food trade policies and other main challenges faced)

- How to enhance the resilience of Food industry? (Climate change resilience and food system productivity, strengthening of local supply chains, diversification of external suppliers).

- How to make Food industry more sustainable? (Showcase best practices and initiatives towards sustainability and resource efficiency, decent jobs and employability in agriculture and aquaculture, women in the Food sector, greening the food sector)

The recommendations of this Conference will be compiled into an outcome document and will guide the future work of the UfM aiming at supporting the efforts of its Member States towards achieving food security through a sustainable food system.