

# Fostering Science Diplomacy in the Mediterranean Region

## Outcome of the Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Science Diplomacy Barcelona, 3 October 2023

*Invited by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in cooperation with the European Commission, representatives of a wide range of stakeholders, including governments, international organisations, NGOs, academia, and the private sector, gathered at the Headquarters of the Union for the Mediterranean in Barcelona on 3 October 2023 to discuss the perspectives for science diplomacy in the Mediterranean Region.*

The participants highlighted that the Mediterranean Region has always been a hub for the exchange of ideas and innovation across borders between North and South, East and West. This knowledge exchange has been beneficial, contributing throughout history to the development of human civilization and the socio-economic progress of societies, thereby contributing also to peaceful cooperation in the region.

Today, the Mediterranean region is at a crossroads. All climate models indicate that the Mediterranean region will be one of the hot spots of global warming, contributing to extreme weather events such as floods, droughts and forest fires, as well as migration, and instability. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated inequalities, including gender-related and among young people as well as ethnic minorities. Water scarcity, sustainable energy supply and food security are challenges that need science, technology and joint endeavours in research and innovation.

Against this background, the participants underlined the role of science diplomacy as a force for good that can provide tangible solutions for the benefit of citizens by fostering trust and cooperation across borders and providing the evidence required to tackle the challenges facing the region. In particular, the participants flagged that science diplomacy action can be fostered by:

- Research infrastructures (hard and soft infrastructures) are institutional lighthouses that bring scientists together across borders, ensuring excellence and bringing together North and South, while benefitting local communities. Ultimate goal is to open the doors of all research infrastructures to those who can best use them for the welfare of the whole region.
- Training and education are key for science diplomacy and should lead to the building of communities of practice. This requires a holistic approach, which is not only based on training programmes, curricula, scholarships and mobility, but also common values.
- Increased channels of exchange between diplomats and researchers as well as an institutionalization of scientific advisory mechanisms between scientists, policy makers and diplomats to address regional challenges.

The participants were convinced that joint science diplomacy action among partners across the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, including in the field of social sciences and humanities, has the potential to trigger innovative ideas and approaches that can help solving challenges not only affecting the Mediterranean region, but also other World regions and humankind as a whole, thereby supporting the World to get back on track to reach the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda.

The participants recognised the region is building on past efforts promoting scientific cooperation, such as initiatives and infrastructures for research and innovation like PRIMA, and the approval of science & technology roadmaps, e.g., in the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean. International visible events such as Medforum can help to convey the opportunities offered by science diplomacy.

The participants called on international organizations, Member States, networks and expert groups to deploy science diplomacy more structurally and strategically as a lever for building bridges across our societies, emphasising the need for an anticipatory dimension and a policy-oriented approach to leverage the potential of science for identifying peaceful ways to jointly tackle common challenges. Likewise, the importance of providing monitoring mechanisms to identify and measure specific impacts of implemented science diplomacy actions was raised.

The participants recognized the UfM engagement towards science diplomacy in the region and its willingness to coordinate with the Member States. They called for further action from the UfM Secretariat, under the guidance of its Co-Presidencies, offering their support as scholars and practitioners. They also found added value in meeting in a Euro-Mediterranean format and as such expressed their wish to reconvene in two years. Furthermore, the participants suggested exploring how a Mediterranean Science Diplomacy Hub could be structured, e.g., to develop novel approaches and exchange best practice.

In closing the conference, the participants expressed their sympathy and solidarity with the victims and their families of the floods that occurred in Slovenia, Greece and Libya in August and September 2023 as well as the earthquakes that affected Türkiye and Morocco this year. Those tragedies should incite us to mobilize further efforts towards intensifying science diplomacy in the Mediterranean Region to facilitate the use of knowledge and infrastructures in view of mitigating risks and being better prepared.

*Disclaimer: This text reflects the views of the participants of the Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Science Diplomacy. It does not necessarily represent the position of the Union for the Mediterranean, the European Union, or their respective Member States.*