

Message from the Secretary General Nasser Kamel



2023 has been an extremely challenging year for the Euro-Mediterranean region as a whole, let alone the Union for the Mediterranean. As I am writing these lines, the devastating escalation of the conflict between Israel and Palestine is still ongoing after more than 200 days. The unprecedented upsurge of violence and human toll has shaken the entire world, and questions our very sense of humanity.

2023 was also the year the Union for the Mediterranean celebrated its 15th anniversary and the last of my mandate at the head of the organisation: it was the opportunity to take a step back and reflect on what we have achieved so far, and where we are collectively heading, to ensure we support and empower Mediterranean citizens to build the futures they aspire for.

Little steps towards more trust, more understanding, and more cooperation, that will eventually help us consolidate the promise of shared peace, stability and prosperity in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

With our member states and partners, we launched a first reform process for the organisation, to assess its role, its functioning, and its impact throughout the years. However, due to the extraordinary

situation across the region, we had to adapt and react: our member states convened for the first time, in the framework of the 8th UfM Regional Forum, to solely discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, focusing on the grave situation in Gaza, its impact on the region and the way forward. The UfM Co-Chairs issued a joint communique that identified points of convergence emerging during the meeting, which you can go through in this report.

At the same time, we strived to continue responding to our peoples' needs, for inclusive growth, decent and fair socio-economic opportunities and a sustainable development that is able to address the urgent environmental and climate crises we are experiencing across the Mediterranean Basin.

The UfM was instrumental in 2023 in building a coalition that led to the launch of its biggest flagship initiative so far: the Blue Med Partnership. Initially mobilising an estimated €1 billion in investments, from more than six of the largest donors and financial institutions in the region, this initiative is a concrete progress in our global efforts to combat climate change and protect the Mediterranean Sea, and a true testimony of our convening power.

Further to that, we have also given a historical push forward to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, through the launch of the first structured joint initiative between the major institutions bound to Barcelona Process: the Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue. Indeed, jointly coordinated by the UfM Secretariat and the Anna Lindh Foundation, and in close partnership with ARLEM, this initiative has reinforced the links between these institutions forming the immediate UfM ecosystem and enhances a true Mediterranean identity and sense of belonging.

Little steps towards more trust, more understanding, and more cooperation, that will eventually help us consolidate the promise of shared peace, stability and prosperity in the Euro-Mediterranean region. A promise we made more than 15 years to our citizens, and that we need more than ever to deliver on.

The UfM, as a regional framework, can and should be, a keystone in shaping a new vision for the future of the region. We look forward to continue building on that in the coming years, consolidating our mandate, our role and our capacity for action, together with our member states, partners and citizens.

Thank you very much for walking this talk with us for so many years.