

Outcome document

High-level Meeting on Science Diplomacy, Cairo, 02/10/2024

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Invited by the Union for the Mediterranean, the League of Arab States, and the European Commission, representatives of governments, international organisations, diplomatic services, research and higher education institutions, and non-governmental organisations, gathered at the Headquarters of the League of Arab States in Cairo on 2 October 2024 to discuss how science, technology and innovation can be transformative engines for dialogue and sectorial cooperation in the Mediterranean region. This document summarises the main outcomes of the discussions.

Throughout history, the Mediterranean has served as a crossroads for the exchange of knowledge, ideas and innovation. Science diplomacy has been practised here for millennia, long before the term was conceptualised as a tool in foreign policy. The long-standing tradition and heritage of connecting science and diplomacy in the Mediterranean has become more important than ever in a world that is characterised by fragmentation and conflict as well as by major scientific-technological breakthroughs impacting the relations between peoples and nations.

Cross-border cooperation in science, technology and innovation plays a key role in providing solutions for the region's most pressing issues, such as climate change, water scarcity, food security, and migration. In addition, cross-border cooperation between scientists can help to keep the dialogue between countries in the Mediterranean going, even under difficult conditions. Against this background, the meeting focused on the below topics.

The meeting discussed the nexus between science diplomacy and cultural diplomacy, highlighting the critical role the universal languages of science and culture play in building bridges between nations, supporting dialogue and mutual understanding. The soft power of science and cultural diplomacy, based on values and the respect for cultural diversity, was underlined as important starting point for further exploration of synergistic approaches linking science and cultural diplomacy in the region.

The meeting highlighted the importance of the Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East (SESAME) in Jordan as a global lighthouse of science diplomacy, which should develop into a regional science and innovation hub and training centre. Despite its excellence and unique membership, SESAME faces serious funding problems, demanding a long-term vision for its operations. To this end, the benefits of SESAME for the region need to be promoted, also by diplomats.

The meeting flagged the importance of the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA) as a key tool for scientific cooperation in the region. PRIMA projects, e.g. related to the Water-Energy-Food-Environment nexus, show that this is possible. The region has common challenges that no one will be able to tackle alone, requiring the cooperation of the scientific community from all countries around the Mediterranean, with women playing a major role.

The meeting discussed a blue-diplomacy approach for the Mediterranean, through which countries in the region can enhance cooperation, build trust, and address common challenges through scientific collaboration, thereby contributing to the sustainable development and conservation of the Mediterranean's marine resources.

The meeting reflected on the need to establish a Euro-Mediterranean Science Diplomacy Hub as a neutral space for discussions between scientists and diplomats, fostering training and capacity-building, also between South and South, cultivating leaders in science diplomacy and a new generation of science diplomats, including through dedicated PhD programmes.

The meeting discussed ways to improve the situation of students and researchers suffering from armed conflicts in the region, in particular in Gaza and Lebanon.

The participants called on international organisations, Member States, networks and expert groups to deploy science diplomacy more structurally and strategically as a lever for building trust across the Mediterranean region and tackling common challenges through joint actions and initiatives. By connecting science-diplomacy scholars and practitioners across the region, the Mediterranean has the potential to further strengthen its historical role as a global hub for the exchange of knowledge, ideas and innovation for the benefit of all.