

V Regional Forum of the Union for the Mediterranean

Barcelona, 27 November 2020

Co-Presidency Statement

The 5th Regional Forum gathered Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Euro-Mediterranean region on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration to reaffirm their strong commitment to its values and principles and renew their commitment to enhance cooperation in the region in the interest of peace, stability, development, and shared prosperity.

The Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in 2008 gave a new impulse to the Process through the establishment of an institutionalized framework with a unique governance model to promote regional cooperation, integration and dialogue in key areas. The Barcelona Process' original baskets of "Political and security partnership", "Economic and financial partnership" and "Partnership in social, cultural and human affairs" remain a valuable basis for cooperation in the Mediterranean region. The 2017 Roadmap for Action remains the comprehensive strategic framework for the work of the UfM.

This milestone Anniversary of this year has provided the opportunity to reflect on the past 25 years and look into the future with a renewed vision. The Ministers recognized the scale and nature of the current regional challenges and reaffirmed their support to the work of the UfM to find joint responses to the difficult situations we are confronted with in these days and age.

Peace and stability continue to be main objectives for the UfM members. The UfM can contribute to these goals in the Mediterranean region by creating, through dialogue and cooperation, a political environment that is conducive to the solution, in relevant fora and on the basis of agreed parameters, of the conflicts and the political tensions affecting members of the UfM. The need to strengthen efforts to solve conflicts and crises that are depriving the region from its right to peace and stability was emphasised.

In this context, all steps were encouraged that contribute to creating political horizons to achieve just and comprehensive Middle East peace and to relaunch effective negotiations to solve the Palestinian Israeli conflict on the basis of the two-state solution and in accordance with international law. It is important that both parties avoid decisions that can undermine trust, including the building of new settlements. The importance of upholding the historical status quo for the Holy Sites in Jerusalem, including with regard to the Hashemite custodianship, was recalled. The indispensable role of UNRWA and the need to support it politically and financially in order to allow it to continue to fulfil its UN mandate was also reaffirmed.

There was also expression of support for the UN efforts in the search of a political solution to the Libyan crisis on the basis of relevant UN resolutions and welcoming of the regional initiatives contributing to these efforts. The objective is to preserve the unity, sovereignty and

territorial integrity of Libya, to stop all foreign interference and achieve national reconciliation, sustainable peace and stability. In this regard, recent progress within the framework of the Joint Security Commission and the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum is encouraging and welcome.

The need to find a political solution to the Syrian crisis that preserves the territorial integrity of the country, restores peace and stability, and creates conditions for the safe, voluntary and dignified return of refugees, in accordance with UNSC resolution 2254, was also emphasised. Full support was expressed for United Nations Special Envoy Geir Pedersen and his efforts to facilitate progress within the Syrian-led Constitutional Committee under UN auspices. There were calls on all parties to engage in good faith in its work, and welcomed the convening of the fourth round in Geneva on 30 November 2020.

Concern is also high about the multiple consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is therefore general agreement on the need to intensify our efforts to contain the pandemic by strengthening cooperation on research and innovation, and exchanging information and scientific knowledge, notably with a view to ensure a global access to vaccines as well as to mitigate the impact on economic growth, employment and social cohesion. It is important to show solidarity and mobilize resources and capacities towards a sustainable post-pandemic recovery paving the way for the creation of more resilient societies and economies in the region.

This year's Regional Forum highlighted the role that the civil society has been playing over 25 years of Euro-Mediterranean partnership. In this respect, the Anna Lindh Foundation, the only Euro-Mediterranean organisation gathering civil society actors of the whole Mediterranean Basin, is playing an important role for the promotion of intercultural dialogue. The Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM and ARLEM also have to continue to play their role respectively to reinforce inter-parliamentary cooperation and to amplify the voices of local and regional authorities and to promote the territorialisation of the Euro-Mediterranean sectoral policies.

Citizens of the region are increasingly exposed to large-scale disinformation, including misleading, and outright false information. It is important to raise awareness and enhance cooperation with relevant stakeholders in this field, including industry and online platforms, to fight disinformation and improve tolerance and strategic communication. Ministers also stressed the importance of fighting against terrorism, extremism and the culture of hate that seeks to divide us, and expressed solidarity against all acts feeding hatred. Ministers called for additional efforts in combating negative stereotyping, intolerance, culture of hate, stigmatization, discrimination and use of violence based on religion or belief and promote instead harmony and respect for the other.

Building on the experience of the past 25 years, the Ministers have recognised the need to prioritise the areas of action where the UfM can play a crucial role and provide for a comparative advantages and agreed to focus the UfM's work in the coming years on the following specific areas:

1. Environmental and climate action:

We need to step up our efforts to tackle root causes of climate change promoting sustainable, green, low-carbon and circular resource-efficient economies, and reverse the dramatic loss of biodiversity in the Mediterranean region. Therefore, we welcomed the initiative for an Action plan to make the Mediterranean a model sea by 2030 to be launched at the One Planet Summit.

2. Sustainable and inclusive economic and human development:

Fragmentation in the region has grown in the past year and the gap has been increasing between the countries in the Northern and the Southern shores. Efforts must be focused on the crucial employment challenges, mainly for young people, as well as on the important issue of investment, in order to tackle the very important challenges in this specific domain. We need to tap on the important human capital and the vast natural resources of our region to deploy its full potential. We need to increase trade exchanges, which will be key for the future of our countries, especially now that the COVID-19 pandemic has harshly hit us. Blue economy can also be an important driver as it has the capacity to encompass growth and sustainability in the Mediterranean basin. Thus, the UfM will intensify regional dialogue in this area and organise a 2nd UfM Ministerial on Blue Economy in Malta in 2021.

3. Social inclusiveness and equality as an essential element in the socio-economic development of the region:

In this regard, the importance to fully involve the younger generations, to empower women and promote gender equality, in terms of rights and opportunities, and to create space for civil society were particularly stressed.

4. Digital transformation:

Digitalisation is a crucial vehicle towards a smart, innovative and sustainable economic development, which will also facilitate trade interlinkages in the region and could become an essential tool to tackle youth unemployment.

5. Civil Protection:

The UfM Platform on Civil Protection should play a key role in the discussion of the common challenges and the concrete actions to develop within the Civil Protection Action Plan for strengthened Euro-Mediterranean cooperation on prevention campaigns, emergency response and crisis management.

Ministerial conferences will take place in the coming months on environment and climate action, sustainable blue economy and energy.

With these objectives in mind, the Ministers reaffirmed the importance to mobilise sufficient financial resources to enable the implementation of UfM labelled projects and reiterated their commitment to support the UfM Secretariat, including through more balanced and predictable contributions to its budget.

With the objective to foster a common Mediterranean identity and increase the visibility and ownership of regional cooperation, we declared the 28th of November as the Day of the Mediterranean. Coinciding with the date of the Barcelona Declaration, the Day of the Mediterranean will provide the opportunity to hold cultural events across the region with a view to strengthening ties, promoting intercultural exchanges and dialogue and embracing the diversity of the region.