

A New Drive for Relations in the Mediterranean

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The Mediterranean today is subject to the structural developments resulting from the political transitions in the south and a crisis from which Europe is yet to emerge. Those of us who hope for peaceful and prosperous Mediterranean relations have the responsibility that both processes are channelled towards greater levels of cooperation, exchanges and solidarity. Those of us who are committed to the Mediterranean cause have the challenge of turning the events of today into a qualitative leap forward in relations and not a step back.

It is in this context that the Union for the Mediterranean must find its place. We are opening a new phase in the organisation's young life, a phase characterised by its institutional stability, now that Jordan and the EU have assumed the southern and northern co-presidency, respectively. In this new phase, the European Commission and the External Action Service play a central role, allowing the UfM to become a privileged instrument of regional cooperation for the EU in the framework of the Neighbourhood Policy, and thereby also guaranteeing the necessary sense of belonging for countries both in the North and the South. We are witnessing increased activism among our southern partners, who see in us a great opportunity to return to growth and consolidate their transitions.

The Secretariat is currently focused on work areas such as energy, water, education, transport, business development and civil society. We are ready to set in motion our first projects in the coming months; projects destined to distribute water to the

people of Gaza, to create a new Euro-Mediterranean University in the city of Fez or to complete the sections that are missing from the motorway that crosses the Maghreb. We want to make a serious and dedicated contribution to building this horizon of possibilities, which are so necessary for a greater understanding to develop between the two shores.

It would be fair to say that in this task we are not alone, and I am proud to affirm that the UfM has been able to put into action coordination mechanisms with other actors also operating in the region, whether that be the 5+5 Dialogue, the Arab League or the Arab Maghreb Union. We have also established important links with the European Investment Bank, and with the group of international financial institutions that operate in the region and are destined to play a central role today in finding the path to recovery, growth and job creation. We hope to be able to complement all those instruments that will help breathe new life into our relations. Together we have the tools needed to make this possible.

I believe I express the feelings of many of the region's citizens when I say that the Mediterranean cause is worth it and that today it is more vital than ever. It is precisely in these moments of change and transformation that the future of our region and the ties that bring its cultures and nations together are at stake. It is right now that we must be capable of laying out all our ambitions, which need the backing of a firm political component.

Only by joining efforts will be capable of responding to the expectations of the region's many young people, to whom we have the duty of offering a future. Employment, development and a way out of the crisis are the fundamental pillars on which we must base this new phase we are beginning.