

## H.E. Nasser Kamel

Secretary General

Union for the Mediterranean, Barcelona

When viewed from the vantage point of Classical Antiquity, what seems most striking about our enchanted part of the world is the fact that there once existed a coessentially Mediterranean culture, which was evidently capable of making our world a better place through the promotion of humanism and the spreading of such values as solidarity, empathy and egalitarianism. This Mediterranean morale is one of the most pronounced icons of a Mediterranean identity that, time after time, came to shape the contours of our world: the high priests of Thebes, Knossos and Hattusa, the Purple Traders of Phoenicia, the natural philosophers of Miletus, the playwrights of Athens, the orators of Rome, the intellectuals of Alexandria, the translators of Toledo and Palermo, the scholars of Constantinople and Fes, the troubadours of Provence, the merchants of Venice and Dubrovnik, the sages of Damascus and Oran, the Renaissance humanists, the pioneers of the Scientific Revolution and the Age of Enlightenment all held high the torch of dialogue, exchange and progress, before passing it down to us.

But it is not this morale alone that defines the Mediterranean imperative; there is also our resilience and capacity for recovery and regeneration. This is another Mediterranean trademark, the blueprints for which can be found following episodes like the natural disaster that wiped out the Minoan Civilization, the Invasions of the Sea Peoples and the Plague that hit Europe in the 14th century. We have always emerged as victors when faced with the most trying of adversities, and this too is a torch we must hold high and a message of hope at a time when there

are worrisome clocks ticking for our region: accelerating climate change, environmental degradation, aggravated socioeconomic disparities, de facto digital disruption with dehumanizing effects and new silicon curtains, persisting economic fragmentation, an eroding *Lebensraum*, and a pandemic that seems to herald an age of anxiety. How can history repeat itself in our favour? How can we be catalysts and agents of change in today's troubled world and how should we navigate its "liquid modernity"? How can we mobilize our resources, capacities and allies to once again overcome adversity and avoid a pyrrhic victory? These, and other concerns, have lain at the heart of the *raison d'être* of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) since it was launched in 2008, building on the noble acquis of the 1995 Barcelona Process.

The tried and trusted Mediterranean ethos of value co-creation is ever present in the UfM's modus operandi and its multistakeholder approach, as it strives to promote integration in a highly fragmented region where waves of Euroscepticism, Afro-pessimism and destabilizing subjectivities and cognitive injustices concerning the Mediterranean region have come to threaten the shared vision of building a common area of peace, stability, security and prosperity for the peoples of the Euro-Mediterranean region. These all broke on the hard rock of development cooperation and a common political will, inspired by the conviction that the magnitude of the current regional challenges calls for an orchestrated regional response.

Ancient African wisdom tells us that if you want to go fast, you go alone; but if you want to go far, you go together. The Union for the Mediterranean, like any other organization, cannot go far in realizing its objectives without going together, hand-in-hand, with a broad array of cooperation and development state

and non-state actors, interlocutors, partners and stakeholders, which together form its extended ecosystem. Whether through bilateral, multilateral, South-South or triangular cooperation, we have been actively engaging with our partners in promoting cooperation and integration in our part of the world, which, unfortunately, features the lowest levels of economic integration on the planet.

In the aftermath of the humanitarian and socioeconomic disruptions provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become ever more evident that enhanced integration is a pressing need, and that it is no longer a matter of choice, but rather a precondition for a timely response to challenges in the region. In this spirit, the first edition of the UfM Progress Report on Regional Integration, issued in May 2021, proved to be more than just a mapping exercise or a point of departure: it yielded surprising statistics and concrete, action-oriented and evidence-based policy recommendations in five domains of integration that are of paramount importance for the region, namely: trade, financial markets, infrastructure, movement of people and research and higher education. The path ahead to fulfil these recommen-

dations passes through closer collaboration and synchronization with governments, public and private sector companies and support organizations, development cooperation agencies, social partners, civil society organizations, universities and research institutes, regional and international organizations, and – of course – think (and do) tanks like the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), which has been fostering effective cooperation and partnerships between the two shores of the Mediterranean for over three decades now.

Finally, the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, through its dedicated team, its extended ecosystem, its convening power, its know-how and its expertise will always stand ready and determined to join, accompany and leverage all meaningful regional efforts in its areas of priority, honouring its role as a unique platform for dialogue and as a regional chapter of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and always aiming to fulfill the legitimate aspirations of the peoples on both shores of the Mediterranean: it is precisely the region's human and natural assets that underpin our commitment to a better future.