Venue: Gala Room, Palau de Pedralbes, Barcelona
(Access via Pere Duran i Farell, 16)

The Mediterranean Cities Conference 2026 will take place on the occasion of the 11th Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Regional Forum, to be held in Barcelona on 25-26 November 2026. This conference, organised by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) and MedCities, with the support of the Barcelona City Council and Provincial Council, seeks to promote a strategic reflection among Mediterranean mayors on how to strengthen the capacity of cities to influence Euro-Mediterranean and European governance. Building on the conclusions of the Conference of Mediterranean Cities Barcelona+30 (Barcelona, 26-27 November 2025), this gathering will also showcase how local actors drive innovation in the face of crises, presenting resilience cases that can be scaled up and replicated across the region.

Unlike Barcelona+30, a broad multi-stakeholder conference, this gathering will have a restricted and strategic format, centred on political debate among 10-15 mayors of key Mediterranean cities, together with European and Euro-Mediterranean institutional representatives and city networks. Its conclusions will feed into the UfM side-event "*Building Mediterranean Resilience in a Fragmented World*", to be held in the framework of the Forum.

Context

In recent years, cities have demonstrated their leading role in international cooperation and dialogue, all the more so in a context of growing fragmentation of global relations and recentralisation of national policies. Cities are now an established channel of cooperation, as shown by the explicit recognition of local and regional governments in the Pact for the Future adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2024, and by the growing presence of city networks in key global fora. This reflects the rise of "*local multilateralism*": an approach that sees cities and regions not only as implementers of global agendas, but as political actors able to influence international decision-making.

2026 is a particularly relevant moment for this agenda, with several global processes shaping the future of urban governance, from the World Urban Forum and the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) World Congress to the mid-term review of the New Urban Agenda. In the Euro-Mediterranean region, marked by open wars, humanitarian crises and the growing impacts of climate change, this debate is even more urgent. Cities are often the first places hit by violence, forced displacement and extreme climate events; but they are also where coexistence can be sustained, basic services preserved, and reconstruction and peace processes prepared.

The Conference of Mediterranean Cities Barcelona+30 confirmed that cities are indispensable actors in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, but also highlighted persistent challenges: regional policies often lack a territorial perspective; local authorities must turn political commitments into concrete policies, often without direct access to decision-making; and their access to European and international funding remains limited and fragmented. The challenge is no longer to create spaces for dialogue but to use them strategically.

The coming years offer important opportunities in this regard, notably the development of the Pact for the Mediterranean, the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the implementation of the new UfM strategic vision. Against this backdrop, the conference seeks to consolidate the space for high-level political dialogue among Mediterranean mayors opened by Barcelona+30, to identify concrete strategies to strengthen cities' institutional and financial influence, and to build a political alliance of Mediterranean cities committed to more inclusive and territorial regional governance. Its conclusions will be gathered in a Joint Declaration.

Programme

Simultaneous interpretation in English, French and Arabic

9:00	**Arrival and registration**

Master of Ceremonies:

Laura Valdés, Head of Policy, Secretariat General, World Association of the Major Metropolises (Metropolis)

9:30	**Institutional welcome and opening remarks**

Maria Eugènia Gay, Maria Eugènia Gay, Deputy Mayor of Barcelona, Sixth Vice-President and Councillor for IIRR and the 2030 Agenda at Barcelona Provincial Council

Clare Hart, Vice-President Montpellier Metropole**,** President of MedCities

Manuel Szapiro, Director of the European Commission Representation in Barcelona

Jaume Duch, Minister for European Union and Foreign Action, Government of Catalonia

10:10	**Keynote speech**

Lea Baroudi, Founder, March Lebanon

Introduced by Amb. Senén Florensa, Executive President, IEMed

10:30-11:45	**Session 1: Cities and Euro-Mediterranean governance – Consolidating the local political voice**

Description:

This session examines the limitations of existing institutional channels and how cities can be systematically integrated into the new UfM strategic vision and the Pact for the Mediterranean.

Participants:

Anan Atteereh, Mayor of Nablus
Francesco Senese, Adviser on international affairs to the Mayor of Naples
Roger Albinyana, Managing Director, IEMed

Moderator:

Hannah Abdullah, Senior Fellow, Cities Programme, German Marshall Fund

Discussant:

Marta Galceran, Senior Research Fellow, Global Cities Programme, CIDOB

11:45-12:15	**Coffee break**

12:15-13:30	**Session 2: Building resilience through local governance: the case of the sustainable blue economy**

Description:

Coastal cities facing conflict, displacement or climate shocks often depend on the same maritime resources now at risk. This session examines the sustainable blue economy, a priority sector of the new UfM strategic vision, as a tool for security and reconstruction: sustainable fisheries protecting disrupted livelihoods, blue-economy investment anchoring post-conflict recovery, and cross-border maritime cooperation holding together strained political relations. Cities present these experiences and draw lessons on governance and financing, feeding into the following session's debate on embedding cities' political role in Euro-Mediterranean governance.

Introductory remarks:

Nisreen Tamimi, Deputy Secretary General for Sustainable Development, Union for the Mediterranean

Participants:

Zakaria Oulad, Council member and Vice-Chair of the Urban Planning and Smart City Commission for Agadir Municipality
Youssef Tohme, Municipal Council Member – Head of the Environment Committee, Saida Municipality
Maíta Fernández Armesto, Director of Strategic Projects Coordination and Transformation Services, Barcelona City Council

Moderator:

Anna Majó, Director of Innovation, Barcelona Activa

Discussant:

Roger Garcia, Director, MedWaves

13:30-15:30	**Lunch break**

15:30-16:45	**Session 3: Local multilateralism for peace-building, resilience and reconstruction**

Description:

This session examines the political, not merely operational, role of cities in conflict and displacement, and how cities can influence, and how to influence Euro-Mediterranean agendas for peace and social cohesion.

Participants:

Samir Avdić, Mayor of Sarajevo
Jack Saadeh, Mayor of Ramallah
Emilia Saiz, Secretary General, UCLG
Kristian Herbolzheimer, Director, International Catalan Institute for Peace

Moderator:

Jusaima Moaid-Azm Peregrina, Associate Fellow, IEMed

------- 5-minute break --------

16:50-17:05	**Presentation of the main conclusions of the event**

Clare Hart, President of MedCities

17:05-17:20	**Closing address**

Jaume Collboni, Mayor of Barcelona

Fadi Hajali, Secretary General ad interim, Union for the Mediterranean

Video-message from **José Manuel Albares**, Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Government of Spain

Group photograph