26th Meeting of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Regional Platform on Research and Innovation

10 December 2020
On 10 December 2020, the 26th Meeting of the Union for the Mediterranean Regional Platform on Research and Innovation was held virtually. The meeting was co-chaired by the Directorate for International Cooperation of the European Commission’s DG on Research and Innovation and by the Higher Council for Science & Technology of Jordan.

**Three thematic priorities: health, renewable energy and climate change**

During the meeting, Member States discussed three thematic priorities for future research on health, renewable energy and climate change based on the preparatory work done by the UfM Expert Group on Research and Innovation. The thematic priorities are addressed in a draft roadmap, Draft Horizontal Integration and Priorities for a Future Crisis Management Concept, which highlights the urgent challenges and knowledge gaps in the Euro-Mediterranean region and offers recommendations towards the horizontal integration of the three priority areas in the UfM Region.

A closer look at the three priority areas demonstrated that they are interlinked. This means that although they are characterised by different impacts and expected risks, they all lead towards sustainable development and innovation promotion.

**Main discussion points**


- Member States were asked to provide written comments to the Draft Roadmaps by 13 January 2021. After which the Platform’s Bureau would meet again to discuss the next steps – i.e. integrate the written comments into the Draft Roadmaps and horizontal document and organise an online stakeholder consultation.

**Next Steps**

- Set up an open public and multi-stakeholder consultation during the first quarter of 2021 with a view to finalise the draft Roadmaps for adoption by mid-2021.

- In the coming months, more reflections on implementing three priority areas and respective Roadmaps - e.g. national tools and programmes, but also regional programmes of the EU like the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) as well as Horizon Europe.

- At the next Bureau meeting a detailed timeline or Work Plan of the main events for 2021 would be presented in the lead-up to the formal adoption of the Roadmaps. This would provide the National Focal Points a clear idea of the key deliverables and milestones.

**Participant summary points**

- Nasser Kamel, UfM Secretary General, mentioned that Research and Innovation (R&I) should be the silver lining of Euro-Med regional cooperation which was
emphasised during the 26 November 2020 UfM Ministerial meeting. Kamel highlighted joint challenges faced by all were related not only to health (COVID-19), but also climate change. He spoke of flagship studies conducted by the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and Environmental Change group (MedECC); and seeks closer synergies with these scientific efforts.

- Maria Cristina Russo, Director for International Cooperation of the European Commission’s DG on Research and Innovation, provided a retrospective on the concrete steps taken in 2020 in the context of the R&I Platform such as establishing the Bureau and the Expert Group. This shows commitment for cooperation at a regional level. Russo also mentioned that the EU’s Multi-Annual Financial Framework is close to being agreed upon and that it will have significant consequences for Horizon Europe. The EC is working on South Med Communication, R&I to be prominent in this political framework. Internal DG R&I discussions on the new global approach on international cooperation in R&I, reflected in work of the Expert Group – e.g. Climate Change.

**Member State Comments**

Marilena Rossano and Maurizio Cellura (Italy) noted the very impressive work of the Expert Group and its positive impact for Civil Society. Agreement on going forward towards public consultation.

Denis Despraux (France) highlighted the work of the Platform/EG and noted the months ahead were crucial for three sectors: climate change, health, and renewable energy. He said Members States need more visibility and that a work plan/calendar will be presented during the January 2021 Bureau meeting. Despraux discussed steps to a Roadmap:

- Regarding the draft Roadmap on climate change, more factors should be considered such as the increase of forest crop fire, soil degradation linked to drought, increased rains and floods, water pollution, shorter plant life, rising sea levels and aquatic diseases with impact on human health.
- Energy Roadmap: desalination and water treatment to be included. Solar hydrogen production addressed only, but there are other production sources. Not only renewable hydrogen. Electrolysis as hydrogen production technology.
- Link to Higher Education needs to be considered more across all Roadmaps.

Rula Atweh (Lebanon) commented on the comprehensive analysis carried out by the Expert Group. She sees COVID-19 as an opportunity to establish inter-related programmes to tackle joint challenges. How new collaborations can be established in these new partnerships?

Comments from other Member States included Malta stressing the impressive work done by the Expert Group and looking forward to the public consultation process Spain mentioned that it will become more involved with the Expert Group’s work and align all past elements with PRIMA, the Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area.

Tunisia expressed more collaboration with experts on Artificial Intelligence to accelerate the transition in the three priority areas. Tunisia asked how civil society organisations are included in the analysis. Finally, Turkey stated that it will contribute with formal written comments and contribute to the stakeholder consultation.