24th Meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Group of Senior Officials in Research and Innovation

25 November 2019
On 25 November 2019, the 24th Meeting of the Euro-Mediterranean Group of Senior Officials in Research and Innovation was held by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). Representatives from the Ministries of Science and Research of UfM Member States participated to discuss the latest developments in regional cooperation in the fields of Research and Innovation (R&I) since the adoption of the Valletta Ministerial Declaration (2017) in addition to discussing new synergies, participants also addressed the Southern Mediterranean’s participation in Horizon 2020 and upcoming opportunities for the region under the final Horizon 2020 work programme for the period 2019-2020.

The meeting was co-chaired by Maria Cristina Russo, Director for International Cooperation of the European Commission’s DG on Research and Innovation and by Khaled El-Shuraydeh, Secretary-General of the Higher Council for Science & Technology of the Kingdom of Jordan.

Participants acknowledged:

- the crucial role of Research and Innovation within the European Union (EU) and countries of the Mediterranean region, calling for stronger collaborative ties.
- the need to synergise national initiatives in support of the main precepts contained in the Rome Declaration signed on 10 June 2019 (at the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the 5+5 Dialogue between North and South Mediterranean countries) – namely to promote sustainable economic growth, social inclusion, and create opportunities for youth in the Mediterranean region.
- the role of countries particularly of the South Mediterranean in the AU-EU High-Level Policy Dialogue on Science, Technology and Innovation and agreed to explore possible synergies at both regional and bilateral levels.
- Horizon Europe, the next EU’s Framework Programme for R&I, to give new impetus and opportunities to establish closer collaboration in R&I, notably with countries from the South Mediterranean, and look forward to a dedicated awareness-raising event organised within the UfM.

Main discussion points

- Progress achieved since signing the Valletta Ministerial Declaration. Highlighted the BLUEMED Initiative and Ocean Research; the positive contributions of the BLUEMED pilot project, A Plastic-free Healthy Mediterranean Sea, towards mobilising key actors and partners for tackling plastic pollution. Participants also spoke of Member States wishing to join the Working Group on BLUEMED, for which nominations are still open.
- The Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area (PRIMA); signing international agreements and relevant Implementing arrangements that allow all concerned South Mediterranean Participating States to participate in PRIMA. Welcome the substantial investments to implement PRIMA through the EU R&I programme Horizon 2020 and by the participating States, stress the need to promote synergies with other initiatives in the region.
- Migration-related research; mainly the substantial investments under the Horizon 2020 Work Programme 2018-2020 on migration research covering its external and internal dimensions. As migration dynamics are intrinsically cross-border, participants agreed on the need to examine and promote more engagement in consortia under Horizon 2020 partner projects especially from countries in the South Mediterranean region.
- Reinforce cooperation for human capital development in higher education and research, notably through an increased participation of South Mediterranean
countries in both Erasmus+ and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA). The participants encouraged identifying synergies and complementarities between MSCA and related UfM initiatives as well as with the Arab States Research and Education Network to exploit opportunities offered by the upcoming MSCA calls.

- Further exploit synergies and closer cooperation between EU-funded programmes in the region, such as the Next Society Programme, EuMedConnect, and the Cross-Border Cooperation Programme in the Mediterranean (CBC Med), as well as other initiatives like the Start-Up Europe Mediterranean.
- Build on the results of EU-funded projects and studies conducted on innovation ecosystems in the South Mediterranean region, such as 5TOI-4EWAS.
- Revitalise the GSO Secretariat with the UfM to prepare for a strategic discussion to take place at the next GSO meeting in early 2020 and to ensure follow-up including the possibility of setting up an R&I Working Group.