Report

28th Meeting of the Union for the Mediterranean Regional Platform on Research and Innovation

9th of June 2022 from 09h00 to 11h15 (CEST)
Virtual

Participants
List of participants attached

Reference documents
- The Draft Ministerial Declaration (TC and clean)
- The draft Implementation Plan

Introductions
Ms. Maria Cristina Russo, Director for Global Approach & International Cooperation in R&I at DG RTD European Commission, opened the meeting by thanking the Higher Council for Science and Technology of Jordan for the successful and collaborative co-chairmanship of the UfM R&I Platform and the Bureau and welcoming Dr. Al Musa, his acting Secretary General and Ms. Itaf Ben Abdallah representing the Union for the Mediterranean on behalf of the Secretary-General Nasser Kamel who couldn’t attend the meeting.

Along with thanking all the participants members and the EC colleagues, Director Russo emphasised the tremendous efforts made jointly over the last years in identifying a specific set of priorities and Roadmaps that are expected to be endorsed at the forthcoming Ministerial Conference on 27 June and to serve as basis for future collaboration in Research & Innovation in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

She reminded the importance of the Global Approach to Research and Innovation of last year that will continue to guide us and ensure that that we cooperate internationally on science and innovation with countries that respect democratic principles and align with key research values such as academic freedom, research integrity, gender and inclusiveness and open science particularly in the light of the current time with the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the Pandemic of COVID 19.

Director Russo reminded the objectives of the meeting, namely to inform the members of the UfM Platform about the state-of-play of the Ministerial preparation and mostly discuss the approach for implementing the Roadmaps put forward in the Implementation Plan, agree on this approach and the next steps. She also reminded that this meeting did not have the intention to pre-empt any commitments that should be made at political level at the Ministerial.

Director Russo gave the floor to Mr. Abdullah Al Musa, Acting Secretary-General at the Higher Council for Science & Technology of the Kingdom of Jordan who started his opening with commending the UfM Bureau for Research and Innovation for adopting the three theories
of change and pathways which highlighted intertwined constrains that impact the socioeconomic conditions facing the Mediterranean countries.

**Dr. Al Musa** thanked the experts who had collectively and diligently developed the Roadmaps along with the UfM and stressed once again that the Mediterranean region countries whether on the south or North or South East coast have shared common problems including Climate change, environmental degradation, Pollution and risks of emerging zoonotic diseases.

He mentioned that understanding the **commonality of shared future justifies the collective and cooperative work among Mediterranean countries**, as advocated by the UfM, to bridge the economical, technical and political divide among countries of the Mediterranean region.

He stated that is time for the region to **benefit from research and Innovation Corporation starting initially from existing platforms like the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation**. Other schemes that allow technology transfer, scientist’s mobility and knowledge sharing should be envisaged and encouraged.

Going back to the 3 priority areas identified in the 3 TCIPs. These boils down to achieving food security, ending poverty and hunger, promoting health and sustaining the environment with the aim to enhance social wellbeing and are perfectly aligned with the **United Nations sustainable goals**.

The **Formal agenda was adopted by the Co-Chairs**.

The introduction session continued with the intervention of **Ms. Itaf Ben Abdallah** on behalf of UfM Secretary General who welcomed the participants thanking them for the commitment demonstrated in working together on science and technology.

**Ms. Ben Abdallah**, acknowledged how much R&I cooperation in the region has grown since the EuroMed Valletta Declaration in 2017 and **recognized the power of science diplomacy** and the value of working together on innovating agri-food systems such as through the **PRIMA initiative**, to mobilising a critical mass in the Mediterranean, or though initiatives such as **“Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030”** of Horizon Europe.

She welcomed the **new roadmaps for R&I on climate action, renewable energy and health**, that have been possible only through the passionate work of this Platform, of the UfM Bureau on Research and Innovation, and the dedicated Expert group.

**Itaf Ben Abdallah** announced that UfM Secretariat will be partnering with HCST to organize, with the support of GIZ, a UfM Forum on Green Innovation and Employability, which will take place in Jordan in the second half of the year and invited all members to participate.

She continued stating that the upcoming UfM Ministerial Conference on Research and Innovation, hosted virtually by France, will be a steppingstone for advancing cooperation in this field and this also thanks to political leadership shown by the UfM CoPresidency of this Platform, DG RTD and the Higher Council for Science and Technology, in representation of the European Commission and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.
She concluded affirming that these political priorities will need to be translated into concrete actions on the ground and mobilise actors and resources, creating momentum for implementation and reminded the commitment of the Secretariat of the Union for the Mediterranean, to supporting these goals, as appropriate, and to mobilise all Platforms and networks at this scope.

**Presentation on State-of-Play preparation UfM R&I Ministerial 27 June, followed by Q&A by the Co-Chairs, Nienke Buisman EC and Dr. Mahmoud Abu Hussein from the Jordan Higher Council for S&T.**

The following key points were made during the presentation:

**State of Play concerning the Declaration:**

- The version received present minor technical changes as compared to the version agreed at ad-hoc SOM in February – due to EC internal legal process;
- The Declaration was sent to UfM SOM for approval on 15/6 and will be shared with participants of Ministerial afterwards;
- The endorsement will be only of the EN version of the Declaration;
- Translation as working documents will be provided in FR and Arabic;

**State of Play Logistics:**

**Participation:**

- The reminder for nominations to be acted was sent on 03/06 by European External Action Service (and also informing of the schedule of a test call to be done on 20/06)
- 19 Nominations so far with 6 Ministers (Bulgaria, Albania, Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Turkey);

**Logistics:**

- Meeting will take place via Interactio with simultaneous translation to FR and Arabic;
- Test meeting will be organise on 20 June from 9:00 to 11:00 to allow participants and main speakers to test Interactio;

**After the presentation, the following reactions from the floor were noted:**

- **ALGERIA** asked about the minor changes to the Declaration that were mentioned by the EC asking the nature of these modifications. Another question relate to clarifying the role of this Platform in approving the mentioned implementation Plan.
  **EC response:** EC suggested using parallel channel to follow up with this specific questions related to the structure established and agreed (Bureau/ UfM Platform/ SOM).
- **LEBANON** asked about the process of sending invitations and mentioned not having received the invitation by their MFA.
  **EC response:** EC responded to Algeria that only technical minors changes were applied not engaging policy changes. The documents was shared in TC. As for the procedure to approve the Declaration it was clarified that the purpose of the meeting of today meeting was related to the implementation plan. On the question of the invitation EC asked the Co-
Chair along with the UfM to intervene to avoid that any potential participants is not participating for lack of information.

- **UFM** reminded the circuit for exchange of invitations through the MFA to technical ministries but reassure the EC this will be followed closely in parallels with UfM Members at several level.
- **ISRAEL** questioned about the possibility for the DG to speak at the debate session.
- **GERMANY** debated the possibility to include a mention to the present war in Ukraine in the Declaration with reference to the implications for energy and food security.
  
  **EC response:** On Israel the EC confirmed that the DG will be granted the possibility to intervene at the debate. On Germany's question EC expressed understanding the comment which is indeed accommodated in more appropriate declarations and in the framework of the many actions operated by the EU.

- **ARLEM (observer)** asked if other points could be accommodated in the debate session.
- **PORTUGAL** asked about the modality of intervene at the debate.
  
  **EC response:** EC informed a full order of intervention will be provided close to the Ministerial Conference.

**Presentation Overview of the technical Implementation Plan (a living-document)**

Mahmoud Abu Hussein and Nienke Buisman co-chairs of the Bureau presented jointly the overview of the technical Implementation Plan reminding that the National Focal Points of the UfM R&I Platform mandated the Bureau in July 2021 to develop an 'Implementation Plan' for the three R&I Roadmaps on Health, Renewable Energy and Climate. The Implementation Plan is referred to in the draft Declaration of the 27 June UfM R&I Ministerial.

The following key points were made during the presentation:

- The UfM Regional Platform for R&I, on 7 July 2021, adopted the roadmaps on jointly agreed R&I priority areas (climate change, renewable energies and health) and proposed to hold an R&I Ministerial meeting in the region in 2022.
- 8 roadmaps have been developed stemming from the awareness of the diversified core constraints of Euro-Mediterranean Countries, encompassing the strategic activities that must be supported for promoting Research and Innovation in each of the three areas.
- In addition to the needed R&I actions, several crosscutting issues should improve collaborative transdisciplinary R&I activities that allow the development of human capital development. Additionally, in particular, the roadmaps identify interconnected impact domains between climate change, health and renewable energies in the Mediterranean countries, where those primarily include water resources, ecosystems, food safety and security, health and human security.
- A group - led by Spain - developed and presented a concept note detailing a preliminary set of implementing modalities at the meeting of the Platform on 7 July 2021. On that basis, the UfM platform on R&I mandated the Implementation Plan Group of the Bureau to further expand the concept note in view of the upcoming Ministerial Conference on R&I on 27 June 2022.
The current document: The document was developed by a working group including the EC, the UfM, France, Spain, Portugal, Egypt, Turkey, Italy, PRIMA and Morocco. It was discussed and circulated to all Bureau Members prior to this meeting.

The roadmaps adopt a horizontal approach to integrated crisis management, whereby the interlinkages between the three R&I Roadmaps are emphasised. Thus, implementation needs to adopt the same approach.

The objective of the current proposed Implementation Plan is to propose a framework for research and innovation and capacity building collaboration in the priority areas, including the sub-thematic areas identified.

Approach for developing the current document:

- **Living Document to be followed up under the umbrella of the platform.** This document is therefore, meant to be adopted, maintained and bi-annually updated by the UfM platform on R&I and the UfM National Focal Points on Research and Innovation.
- Adopt a **holistic approach to implementation** - include cross cutting issues and horizontal integration.
- Explore all possible instruments and cooperation modalities to implement and valorise the roadmaps.
- **Focus on existing initiatives** (considering new ones, only wherever needed).
- **Fostering existing frameworks** and initiatives is a priority before developing new ones.
- The principles for implementation at policy, programme and project level are those of cooperation and coordination, synergies and co-funding, and impact-driven and inclusive approaches.
- Involve all stakeholders in the region.

The document largely aims at exploring possible instruments and cooperation modalities to implement and valorise the roadmaps, taking into consideration that all proposed instruments as well as national, regional and bilateral programmes have their own strategic agendas, as well as programming cycles.

The actions (R&I and capacity building) included in the roadmaps could be categorized into four types of actions. R&I actions, Enabling and cross cutting actions and infrastructure, Capacity building actions, and Coordination and communication actions.

Some of the actions could be directly undertaken and initiated by the UfM platform on R&I in coordination with the UfM Co-Presidencies (EC and Jordan), its Secretariat and Member States. Other actions need to be undertaken by existing programmes or funding bodies.

Main implementation Pillars are:

**Pillar 1: Mapping/Portfolio Analysis of EUROMED R&I Cooperation (6 months)** that will be a study aiming at mapping the existing EUROMED R&I cooperation portfolio to allow for building on existing knowledge, capturing potential for synergies and avoiding duplication. The mapping will be the benchmark against the roadmaps to identify gaps. This could potentially be followed up with a study to assess the outputs of existing projects and need for next steps to build on such outputs.
**Pillar 2: Integration of needed actions into existing programmes** (Ongoing action-biannual). The needed R&I and capacity building actions should be officially transmitted by the UfM platform on R&I to the funders/owners of the existing programmes at EU and UfM Member States level (through the National Contact Points), according to their programming cycle. Those include EU programmes (HE, Global Europe, Erasmus plus), but also National programmes. To ensure coordination between funders and funding instruments in the region as well as engagement of national funders, communication will be initiated and guided by UfM Platform on R&I, while coordination of this communication will be maintained by the UfM Secretariat. For example we could think of a newsletter or simple communication by email and holding Platform meetings with the funders.

**Pillar 3: Stakeholders’ Communication and coordination R&I platform in the region** (short-term action (1 year)) For the coordination of knowledge management, a communication concept is key and needs to be developed, also through a sustainable and flexible Knowledge Management and Communication Framework (KMCF), for multi-stakeholder dialogues and learning beyond short-term projects or programmes in the region. This platform needs to be carefully designed to avoid duplication. It will aim at integrating/building on existing structures. It will aim at creating a one-stop shop for communication, clustering, networking in the region. It will also aim at involving all stakeholders.

**Pillar 4: Monitoring and Evaluation and Learning (MEL)** (short term action (1 year)) Expecting to have a Mid-term evaluation in 5 years and an impact analysis in 10 years. To monitor our progress in terms of implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation and Learning framework should be put in place by the UfM platform on R&I involving the UfM Member States in close collaboration with UfM Secretariat. The framework needs to be officially communicated to all relevant stakeholders, where such a framework will greatly support the alignment and coordination of actions towards common goal.

**After the presentation the following interventions from the floor were noted:**

Cristina Russo agreed with the co-chair to continue moderating the discussion with the UfM R&I platform members:

- **Agreement on the proposed implementation approach set out in the Implementation Plan**
- **The platform would mandate the Bureau to start implementing the approach** Ms Russo opened the debate:

  - **ALGERIA** asked if a budget have been already pre identified of the mentioned pillars of the implementation Plan and ask clarification about the validation of this document.
  - **EC response**: EC remind the implementation plan is a living document and as already mentioned the process of its validation is already established (Bureau/ UfM Platform/ SOM). EC thanked Algeria for the interesting question on the possibility of defining a budget for the pillars of the Implementation Plan, explaining this exercise will be done including all potential contribution by Members.
  - **SPAIN** thanked the work of the Co-Chair and the UfM for organising the meeting and the Ministerial Conference. Affirmed that both the Roadmaps and implementation plan seems
to align with the current geopolitical situation particularly to complement the already existing initiatives. He mentioned the strong support of Spain for PRIMA.

- **MOROCCO** asked clarification about the next mid-term evaluation and the final 10 years evaluation.
- **JORDAN** insist to initiatives to be conveyed to implement the RM substantiate with specific actions in R&I Potential instrument and cooperation modalities only when necessary
- **EC response** on Spain and Jordan, EC reminded we are preparing the Work Programme 2023-2024 for Horizon Europe and looking forward also to use the fund available with Global Europe but the aim is to hear from each member you where they see any national and regional initiative to be integrated in this frame. Question of Jordan the approach chosen was indeed an holistic one and focus on existing programmes but leave the door open to potential new initiatives. On Morocco question EC explain the described delays (+5 years +10 years for final evaluation) are standards and the bureau is mandated to plan the structure of this Pillar more into details.
- **FRANCE** Thanked the UfM, EU and Jordan for organising the meeting and underlined the importance of the potential achievements of the UfM ministerial co-organised by France. Also underlined the approach followed for the implementation plan could tackle the priorities identified and avoid duplication.
- **MOROCCO and PORTUGAL** mentioned the potential connections with the 5+5 Dialogue platform who is indeed planning a Ministerial Conference and Declaration in the coming months.
  **EC response:** EC thanked for the response and reaffirmed the important synergies with the 5+5 Dialogue that need to be strengthened enhancing the dialogue with all countries involved but not referring it directly in the implementation plan.
- **MOROCCO finally asked clarification about the order** that will be followed for the participation at the debate session of all Ministries/representatives.
  **EC response:** EC informed a full order of intervention will be provided close to the Ministerial Conference.

Wrap-up & Conclusions
Ms Cristina Russo thanked all participants for their contributions to this meeting, emphasising the importance of enhancing our dialogue. She reminded the participants that the meeting of the Senior Officials of the UfM will be held on 15 June during which the R&I Ministerial declaration is expected to be approved and of course the Ministerial meeting on 27 June for which she asked once again to confirm the participation of Ministers of the respective countries as soon as possible, in order to finalise the preparations e.g. in terms of speaking allocations.

Before passing the floor to **Dr Abdullah Al Musa** for his concluding remarks, **Ms Cristina Russo** verified if objections were raised by the Members about giving an agreement on the approach set out for implementation and announced that the Bureau is mandated to start preparing the implementation and inform the UfM Platform of the progress at the next meeting of the Platform.

**Dr Abdullah Al Musa** concluded expressing satisfaction for having reach such agreement on the implementation plan for the fruitful discussions and thanked Director Russo for moderating the meeting also on his behalf due to technical problem with the camera.