

Report

27th Meeting of the Union for the Mediterranean Regional Platform in Research and Innovation

7th of July 2021 from 09h00 to 12h15 (CEST)

Introductions

Dr Dia Eddin-Arafah, Secretary-General of Jordan's Higher Council for S&T and co-chair of the Platform, opened the meeting by emphasising that the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue in R&I is important for promoting entrepreneurship and sustainable development in the region. The achievements of the Platform in this past year of intensive work are remarkable.

His Excellency, Mr Nasser Kamel Secretary-General of the UfM, stressed that Research and Innovation are one of the beacons of Euro-Mediterranean collaboration in the context of the UfM. R&I are central to the Mediterranean region and are one of the top political priorities. This comes with a heavy responsibility. He also commended the many efforts in creating a new agenda for the Mediterranean. The UfM Secretariat promises to re-double efforts in relations with UfM Member States in the specific field of R&I.

Cristina Russo, Director for the Global Approach to R&I in DG RTD, mentioned that the Commission adopted the new Global Approach on Research and Innovation on 18 May. This is new and updated strategy on R&I on global level, proposing a more targeted approach to scientific international cooperation but at the same time keeping the spirit of openness. The strategic autonomy principle is applied in those cases where it is justified. Cooperation with countries of the Southern Mediterranean has a particular place in the Global Approach, in the context also of the renewed partnership with the South Mediterranean of the European Commission and European External Action Service.

Presentation on PRIMA by the Co-Chairs, Prof Angeo Riccaboni and Prof Mohamed El-Shinawi

The following key points were made during the presentation:

- Mutual respect, common goals, and values, are behind the success of PRIMA.
- The overarching goal is of attaining higher scientific cooperation in the region, and creating better links with leading scientists. There's a high ambition for the future.
- PRIMA has half a billion euros budget over 7 years, implemented across all 19 participating states. Coherence with the priorities of the green deal, farm-to-fork, and global approach to R&I

of the European Commission. 129 PRIMA projects with over 1000 beneficiaries (164 million euros).

- Principle of equal footing in governing and managing PRIMA. For example, in the PRIMA Secretariat. Promoting nexus on Energy-Water-Food & Environment. Breaking silos in traditional way of doing research and innovation.
- PRIMA fully supports the new R&I Roadmaps and stands ready to collaborate with UfM and Co-Presidency to implement them.

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

- **LEBANON.** PRIMA is an operational tool and platform. It plays a major role in strengthening R&I and networking in the Mediterranean basin. New priorities of Health, Climate Change, and Renewable Energies, there are many possibilities to integrate horizontally with PRIMA. Further exploring these possibilities is necessary and there are still expectations.
- **FRANCE.** PRIMA central for strengthening R&I cooperation in the Mediterranean, both North and South shores. Key challenges addressed of food security, sustainable agricultural systems, and water scarcity. Alignment of PRIMA with the new priorities identified in the Roadmaps of the UfM.
- **PORTUGAL.** Full commitment to PRIMA initiative. Creating strong ties between stakeholders, i.e. citizens, researchers, private sector.
- **MOROCCO.** PRIMA important tool for coordination of researchers in North and South shores of Mediterranean. Morocco is strategic partner in R&I for PRIMA. More calls are needed in the area of Health. Suggestion to have a program or initiative dedicated to health.
- **ITALY.** Strong engagement of Italy since the beginning for PRIMA. PRIMA is a truly collective effort. More financial leverage could be explored.
- **TURKEY.** support since the beginning for PRIMA. Strong interest of Turkish researchers in Sections 1 & 2 of PRIMA.
- **MALTA.** Emphasised strong co-ownership principle behind governance of PRIMA. National investment of 5 million euros in Malta along SRIA of PRIMA.
- **ALGERIA.** Strong support for future priorities of PRIMA and alignment with UfM.
- **SPAIN.** Despite being a “young” initiative PRIMA addresses the goals of the Valletta Declaration and main common challenges faced in the region. Implementation of PRIMA has been successful.
- **ISRAEL.** Strong commitment for PRIMA. More than three years needed for full evaluation of result under PRIMA. Successful projects in water management.
- **GERMANY.** Strong commitment for PRIMA. Satisfied with results of PRIMA so far. PRIMA should be used and at the core for implementation of UfM Roadmaps.
- **JORDAN.** Key advantages of PRIMA is building mutual trust and networking in the region for researchers.

Presentation & Overview of the Roadmaps/TCIPs for Climate Change, Renewable Energies, Health

Mahmoud Abu Hussein and Nienke Buisman presented on the Roadmaps / Theories of Change & Impact Pathways. The Roadmaps create a common reference framework or agendas for future R&I efforts (e.g. creation of extensive channels/infrastructure for hydrogen production in the field of renewable energies) and collaboration to tackle common challenges. An extensive on-line consultation was performed with over 106 contributions received. The Roadmaps were adjusted based on the feedback received.

Armela Dino then presented the concept note for implementation of the UfM Priorities and Roadmaps. The basic structure follows first an analysis of lessons learnt from PRIMA in implementation of SRIA, then an overview of key implementation modalities (e.g. programmes and instruments). A preliminary timeline is also presented from the adoption of the Roadmaps towards the final milestone of the development of a full-fledged implementation plan in view of the Ministerial meeting to be scheduled in 2022.

After the presentations the following interventions from the floor were noted:

- **ALGERIA.** Need to take into account disaster risk reduction component in the agendas proposed under the Roadmaps (e.g. development of renewable energies). Need to develop Artificial Intelligence in new agenda being proposed.
- **FRANCE.** This work on the Roadmaps gives new dynamism to deliberations on future priorities and implementation. Transversal priorities need to be preserved, i.e. open science, social sciences and humanities. Higher education needs to be further developed. More elaborated implementation plan needs to be developed in view of Ministerial meeting in 2022. Greater place for Mediterranean targeted calls in Horizon Europe – i.e. following the model of the Africa Initiative in the 1st WP of Horizon Europe.
- **MALTA.** Idea of collaboration platform for funding agencies is welcome. Develop implementation plan in line with comments received from Senior Officials today.
- **PORTUGAL.** Strong support for context presented in the concept note for implementation. Approval for the suggested list of implementation modalities. Knowledge dissemination and exchange is emphasised especially in domain of earth observations both for land and seas. Open science, open platforms for data sharing, and citizen science dimensions also emphasised for future development of priorities and implementation plan.
- **MOROCCO.** Acknowledgment of good work by the experts on the Roadmaps. Main question now is how to better integrate Mediterranean Partner Countries in the future calls that would potentially result from the Roadmaps and new agenda in R&I under the UfM.
- **ITALY.** Important to monitor impact of programmes foreseen and boost learning component for regional programmes such as PRIMA. Need for leveraging financing in view of these new priorities and Roadmaps. Agreement to give the mandate for elaboration of implementation plan.
- **ISRAEL.** Agreement and support towards development of implementation plan. Focus on reinforcing existing programmes and not creating new ones.

- **SPAIN.** Existing instruments should be strengthened. Boost leverage of Mediterranean in future Horizon Europe calls according to the priorities and Roadmaps developed by the experts. PRIMA can support in strengthening R&I collaboration in these fields in the future.

Intervention by Mr John Bell, Director for Healthy Planet – DG RTD

Mr Bell mentioned that the Neighbourhood is a strategic partner of Europe's green transition. There are many great climate challenges in the Mediterranean, such as desertification, which are at the heart of EU agenda/priorities. Principles of reciprocity and equal footing, as emphasised in the new global approach for R&I, should guide deliberations and initiatives of this platform. More work with closest partners and neighbours is needed.

The Roadmaps are an excellent example of this multi-lateral collaboration. PRIMA is an accomplished instrument which the European Commission is pleased to stand behind. PRIMA has delivered on its goals which are set out in its Basic Act. Fulfilling its specific objectives to involve relevant public and private sectors and align national priorities/policies towards SRIA and key challenges. PRIMA is solutions focused and can serve its support to the implementation of the UfM Priorities and Roadmaps.

European partnerships on Water Pollution are important to raise as well in future implementation. At a later stage discussion on how to integrate priorities within Horizon Europe Missions – e.g. Mission Starfish on preserving marine ecosystems.

Wrap-up & Conclusions

- Agreement on adoption of the Roadmaps and mandating the Bureau for developing the implementation plan in view of the planned Ministerial meeting of next year. No objections from the floor.
- Need to emphasise connectivity, complementarity, and innovation, in enhancing our dialogue.