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**JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL,
THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE
COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood

A new Agenda for the Mediterranean

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Introduction

Twenty-five years ago the European Union and the Southern Mediterranean partners¹ committed to turning the Mediterranean basin into an area of dialogue, exchange and cooperation, guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity. The 25th anniversary of the Barcelona Declaration reminds us that a **strengthened Mediterranean partnership remains a strategic imperative for the European Union**, as the challenges the region continues to face require a common response, especially ten years after the Arab Spring. By acting together, recognising our growing interdependence, and in a spirit of partnership, we will turn common challenges into opportunities, in our mutual interest.

To this end and within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy **this Joint Communication proposes a new, ambitious and innovative Agenda for the Mediterranean**, drawing for the first time on the full EU toolbox and the ground-breaking opportunities of the twin green and digital transitions, in order to relaunch our cooperation and realise the untapped potential of our shared region. **The perspective of the post-COVID-19 recovery offers a rare opportunity for Europe and the Mediterranean region** to commit to a common and people-centred agenda and the actions necessary for its implementation.

The Southern Mediterranean region is facing governance, socio-economic, climate, environmental and security challenges, many of which result from global trends and call for joint action by the EU and Southern Neighbourhood partners. Protracted conflicts continue to inflict terrible human suffering, trigger significant forced displacement, weigh heavily on the economic and social prospects of entire societies, especially for countries hosting large refugee populations, and intensify geopolitical competition and outside interference. Too many people risk their lives by attempting to enter the EU irregularly, fuelling a smuggling industry that is ruthless, criminal and destabilising to local communities. The threats of terrorism, organised crime and corruption continue to feed instability and stifle prosperity. Economic growth in the Southern Neighbourhood has not kept pace with demographic growth.² The region has one of the lowest levels of regional economic integration in the world³. Unsustainable use of natural resources and climate change⁴ jeopardise access to water, food, and energy, accelerate desertification and loss of biodiversity, and threaten lives and livelihoods. Significant economic and gender inequalities persist, and governments struggle to meet the aspirations of today's youth.

¹ Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia. The designation Palestine shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

² Average GDP per capita is less than one eighth of the EU's 2020 Edition, Statistics on European Neighbourhood Policy countries 2020 Edition, Eurostat.

³ With mere 5.9% exports to the region, intra-regional trade is a fraction of the countries' total trade - <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/regions/euro-mediterranean-partnership/>

⁴ According to the Mediterranean Experts on Climate and environmental Change report first Mediterranean assessment report, the region warms 20% faster than the rest of the world.

The urgency of addressing these challenges is further reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has illustrated starkly shared vulnerabilities and our mutual interdependence. The **new Agenda for the Mediterranean** incorporates new areas and forms of cooperation identified during the crisis. The new Agenda for the Mediterranean offers opportunities for new partnerships on strategic priorities of green and digital transition and is based on the conviction that sustainable prosperity and resilience can only be built in strong partnership across the Mediterranean. Our partnership will be based on common values and dialogue, and progress on our shared socio-economic and political agenda, including on reforms in areas such as governance and the rule of law, and macroeconomic stability and the business environment. **The new Agenda aims for a green, digital, resilient and just recovery, guided by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁵, the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal⁶.**

This Communication sets out the objective for the years to come to build fairer and more prosperous and inclusive societies for the benefit of people, especially youth.

To seize this momentum, the Joint Communication proposes the following **key directions for our partnership**:

- An “**Economic and Investment Plan for the Southern Neighbours**” will help **spur long-term socio-economic recovery**, foster sustainable development, address the region’s structural imbalances, **and tap into the region’s economic potential**. The plan includes concrete flagship initiatives in priority sectors. It aims to increase the region’s attractiveness towards investors. We will seek strategic engagement with international financial institutions (IFIs), in particular the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, as well as banks from the region and the private sector. A renewed commitment to implement and support inclusive socio-economic reforms, especially of the business environment, sustainable economic growth and stability-oriented macroeconomic policies underpinned by a long-term strategy, is essential for these initiatives to succeed.

The Economic and Investment Plan is indicative and non-exhaustive and may evolve depending on progress on policy and political issues and in bilateral relations between partner countries. In the period 2021-2027, subject to the entry into force of the relevant legal bases under the next Multi-annual Financial Framework and without prejudging the outcome of the programming process, the Commission proposes to mobilise up to **EUR 7 billion** under the Neighbourhood and Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI)⁷. This support includes provisioning for EFSD+ guarantees and blending under the Neighbourhood Investment Platform, which would help mobilise private and public investments of up to **EUR 30 billion** in the Southern Neighbourhood.

⁵ [UN Resolution 70/1 Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.](#)

⁶ ‘The European Green Deal’ (COM(2019) 640)

⁷ This is subject to the final adoption of the draft Regulation establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument.

- **Joining forces to fight climate change, decrease harmful emissions, use resources sustainably and speed up the green transition.** We need to prepare for long-term scenarios where new forms of low-carbon energy gradually replace fossil fuels. For this purpose, the Commission will propose to partner countries comprehensive initiatives promoting climate neutral, low carbon and renewable energy, building on key elements of the European Green Deal such as the Hydrogen Strategy⁸. Fostering investments, in energy efficiency, renewable energy and a new focus on clean hydrogen production, including through adequate regulatory and financial incentives, and the regional integration of electricity markets and networks will be priorities. This will contribute to preserving our Mediterranean common goods to the benefit of all. We will also help our partners increase their resilience to climate change by reinforcing our action on adaptation in particular in key vulnerable sectors such as agriculture and water.
- **A renewed commitment to the rule of law, human and fundamental rights, equality, democracy and good governance** as the bedrock for stable fair, inclusive and prosperous societies, with respect for diversity and tolerance. Respect for human rights, including social and labour rights, gender equality and rights of the child, builds citizen's trust. The rule of law and strong institutions that protect rights and fight inequalities, serve human and economic development by contributing to a safe and predictable business environment, help attract foreign direct investment, increase economic resilience and combat poverty and inequalities. Democratic governance and the systems of a responsive state, accountable institutions and the fight against corruption further underpin this commitment. Combatting manifestations of intolerance, racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim hatred and other forms of xenophobia as well as protecting minorities must remain a shared priority across the region. Special attention will be given to the promotion of the role of women in society and the economy.
- **Jointly addressing the challenges of forced displacement and irregular migration and seizing the benefits of legal migration efficiently and effectively, through comprehensive tailor-made and mutually beneficial partnerships, protecting migrants and refugees' rights, in line with the European New Pact on migration and asylum⁹.** This is crucial for Europe and the Southern Mediterranean, where migration flows are affecting both hosting societies and transit countries. The increased opportunities and jobs that will be generated by the Economic and Investment Plan, especially for women and young people, will contribute to reducing factors that lead to irregular migration. Acting together as partners is key.
- **A renewed commitment to unity and solidarity between EU Member States, as well as a mutual and shared commitment and joint actions with partners in the Southern Neighbourhood,** is a precondition for the effective implementation of the Agenda for the Mediterranean. This holds true for efforts to resolve conflicts and address shared security concerns, as well as for economic and sectoral cooperation. The full engagement of EU Member States is especially important. Their diplomatic networks, long-standing security and

⁸ 'A hydrogen strategy for a climate-neutral Europe' (COM (2020) 301).

⁹ 'A New Pact on Migration and Asylum' COM(2020) 609.

development cooperation, and their capacity to mobilise the private sector, will be indispensable in reaching the ambitious objectives set out in this Communication. To build such a unified effort, we propose to strengthen significantly the political and policy dialogue across the Mediterranean. Efforts will continue to enhance regional cooperation, with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) as a focal point, and support sub-regional and inter-regional cooperation, notably with African partners¹⁰. The EU will also be ready to explore further regional, sub-regional or **trilateral cooperation and joint initiatives between partner countries across the board**, including in light of the **recent normalisation of relations between Israel and a number of Arab countries**.

The renewed partnership for the Mediterranean and the accompanying Economic and Investment Plan will allow the EU and its Southern Neighbourhood partners to address the many challenges facing our joint region today.

The new Agenda for the Mediterranean proposes a range of actions along the following key policy areas:

- 1) Human development, good governance and the rule of law
- 2) Strengthen resilience, build prosperity and seize the digital transition
- 3) Peace and security
- 4) Migration and mobility
- 5) Green transition: climate resilience, energy, and environment

1. Human development, good governance and the rule of law

Human Development

A human development approach is a key element of our Agenda. This approach aims to improve people's quality of life beyond the economic dimension, upholding their freedoms and rights, providing them with opportunities, and fostering resilient, fair, inclusive and empowered societies.

Health

Health is the first and foremost condition for decent life. The COVID-19 pandemic has raised challenges to health security and healthcare systems and impacted deeply economies and whole societies. The EU and our partners will need to draw the lessons from the COVID-19 crisis to **strengthen health systems and social protection systems, preparedness and response capacities**. The EU has and will continue to provide swift and substantial support to alleviate the disproportionate burden of the crisis on the most vulnerable and those at-risk, including youth and women¹¹. **Vaccines are a global common good and vaccination is what will help to put an end to the pandemic worldwide.** The EU will maintain its support to the COVAX Facility, including the establishment of a

¹⁰ In the spirit of the "whole of Africa" approach and in line with Joint Communication 'Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa' (JOIN(2020) 4)

¹¹ A support package of over EUR 2.3 billion for the Southern Neighbourhood was mobilised under the EU budget in the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak.

humanitarian buffer of about 100 million doses. In a Team Europe spirit, the EU has so far mobilised EUR 853 million in support of COVAX, and remains committed to COVAX as the global initiative to ensure equitable and fair access to safe and effective vaccines for Low and Middle Income Countries. Moreover, building on the experience of the EU's Vaccine Strategy, the Commission is ready to set up an EU vaccine sharing mechanism. This would ensure the sharing of access to some of the 2.3 billion doses secured by the EU with special attention given to the Southern Neighbourhood, alongside the Western Balkans, our Eastern Neighbourhood and Africa. This could primarily benefit health workers, as well as humanitarian needs. This work needs to be undertaken on the basis of "zero waste", requiring recipient countries to be sufficiently prepared.

Empowered youth

Investing in young people and children should be at the heart of our cooperation. Empowerment, participation and involvement of young people as agents of change is key to achieving the priorities of the Agenda 2030. We propose to (i) support the mainstreaming of youth in national policies, (ii) help our partners improve their education systems governance and (iii) give priority to addressing structural causes of school dropouts; young people not in education, employment or training; skills mismatches, lack of opportunities, youth unemployment; and brain drain. Effective coordination and partnerships across policy fields, including with youth organisations, are crucial in terms of boosting quality employment as well as education and training opportunities. We need to work together to increase people-to-people contacts as a successful cooperation area with tangible results and benefits for all. Opening up and facilitating access to EU programmes for our Southern Partners, as well as to relevant European networks will be crucial. In this context, the Southern Mediterranean will remain a priority region under the Erasmus+ programme. Over the 2021-2027 period under Erasmus+, young people will benefit from new capacity building opportunities in the fields of **vocational education and training, sport and digital education and youth**. The EU will aim to better spread the benefits of Erasmus + across the region and increase the uptake of the Creative Europe programme to make the most of the creativity of the region's young people. Child protection programmes and psychosocial support for children affected and displaced by conflict need to be improved with particular focus on access to education and healthcare.

Good governance and the rule of law

Good governance and the respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, democratic institutions and the rule of law are founding principles of the EU, integral to our partnership since the Barcelona Declaration, and part of our joint commitments. Furthermore, good governance, the rule of law and human rights, including social and labour rights, social dialogue and equal access to justice, foster peace, inclusive prosperity and stability. These are the foundations for decent jobs, fair and inclusive growth, and building long-term sustainability and investment.

In line with the “EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy for 2020-2024”¹², the EU will step up its engagement with partners to promote the respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic values. The independence and accountability of the judiciary and prosecution are essential for state institutions to abide by the law, for citizens to be able to exercise their rights, and for the fight against human rights violations, corruption or organised crime. Sustainable structural reforms of civil and judicial administrations will reduce inequality and promote economic growth. A human and user-centric approach to the digitalisation of systems and services will increase state efficiency and build trust in institutions. Democratic principles should rule the governance of the internet and the functioning of social media. The EU will continue to engage with partner countries to ensure a high level of protection of the fundamental rights to **privacy and data protection** and promote further convergence with EU and international data protection standards, facilitating commercial exchanges and law enforcement cooperation.

The incentive-based approach¹³ set out in NDICI for the Neighbourhood region will provide additional financial support to those countries, which show strong ambition in implementing inter alia, governance and rule of law reforms. The level of support will be adjusted to each partner’s respect for commitments and their level of implementation as regards shared values and reform progress, in particular on governance and the rule of law.

In order to protect the EU’s financial interests, it is imperative that the Southern partners ensure that fraud, corruption, money laundering, and misappropriation are addressed with effective, dissuasive and proportionate criminal sanctions as well as through effective and efficient cooperation with the European Anti-Fraud Office. Southern partners that are parties to international agreements on mutual legal assistance should accept the European Public Prosecutor’s Office (EPPO) as a competent authority of the EU Member States participating in the EPPO for the implementation of those agreements¹⁴.

The EU will promote a rule of law culture through close involvement of civil society and the business community. Civil society organisations and social partners’ organisations remain key interlocutors in shaping and monitoring EU cooperation. The EU will continue to support concrete initiatives to reinforce civil society organisations and human rights defenders. Gender equality is not only a universally recognised human right but also an imperative to well-being, economic growth, prosperity, good governance, peace and security; it is a field in which we need to step up our efforts, including via mainstreaming gender across cooperation programmes and target actions, in line with the EU’s third gender action plan (GAP)¹⁵. We will promote initiatives to protect women’s rights and their socio-economic, civic, and political participation.

¹² ‘EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2020-2024’ ([JOIN \(2020\)5](#)).

¹³ NDICI Regulation, Article 17.

¹⁴ Cooperation between the EPPO and Southern partners should also be facilitated by the conclusion of working arrangements.

¹⁵ ‘EU Gender Action Plan III’ (JOIN (2020)17).

In line with UN Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the EU will continue to work with our partners to ensure the full enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities.

Action points: Promote human rights, the rule of law, democracy and good governance, gender equality and equal opportunities for all and support to civil society

- Further developing relevant legislative and institutional reforms in the human rights and good governance areas.
- Promoting modern, efficient and accountable public institutions and policies, including electoral observation and assistance as well as independent justice systems that deliver for all people, protect the rights of suspects, support victims of crime and promote improved detention conditions.
- Supporting steps to combat all forms of discrimination¹⁶
- Promoting international social and labour rights, as well as international labour standards as classified by the International Labour Organization (ILO)
- Supporting the economic empowerment of women and youth (including children), encouraging their active involvement in decision-making.
- Promoting steps to eliminate violence against women and girls, including conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence
- Providing capacity building for civil society organisations (CSOs), including support for the digital and green transition
- Supporting the development of modern data protection frameworks based on horizontal rules enforced by strong and independent supervisory authorities. Promoting the ratification and implementation of the relevant international conventions

Action points: Enhance human development, health and cooperation on youth, education, skills and culture

- Supporting health systems preparedness and response capacities to pandemics
- Participation in EU programmes like: Erasmus+, Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions under Horizon Europe, Creative Europe Programme, as well as in relevant European networks
- Cooperation and experience sharing in accompanying innovation efforts and support to the development of smart specialisation strategies
- Cooperating on digital education under the 2021-2027 digital education action plan
- Cooperating on Platforms of Centres of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) including through the ETF Network of Excellence, to create local "skills ecosystems" and enhance reskilling.
- Cooperating in the anticipation of skills needs and in the design and development of skills and strategies in a lifelong learning perspective, with the support of the European Training Foundation for vocational education and training (VET), skills and capacity

¹⁶ Including on grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

development, including skilling for green jobs and green economy

- Supporting integrated approaches and the capacities of relevant ministries (education, employment, health, culture and social protection) to improve the access and quality of services to young people and people not in education, employment or training (NEETs)
- Scaling up initiatives inspired by the EU Youth Guarantee scheme

2. Strengthen resilience, build prosperity and seize the digital transition

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all economies around the Mediterranean, exacerbating structural economic imbalances¹⁷ and highlighting the need for inclusive, resilient, sustainable, and connected economies. Efforts should leave no one behind and enable countries to seize trends including the twin green and digital transition, which could be accelerators of sustainable growth.

Resilient economies

Strengthening socio-economic resilience should remain a key cooperation priority. This implies that we build economic buffers against future shocks and address balance of payment challenges, including unsustainable debt dynamics. Macro-financial assistance, based on the fulfilment of specific conditions, and targeted assistance, mainly through budget support¹⁸, for the implementation of public financial management and domestic revenue mobilisation strategies, will contribute to efforts to increase fiscal space¹⁹ and fiscal justice.

A stronger use of the euro in the region would reinforce links with the EU and facilitate economic and financial stability. It would ensure better correlation between the region's main trade and investment partners and diversification in the currency mix used for payments, trade and risk management.

A renewed commitment to improving the business climate²⁰ will be essential in order to build the trust of local and international private sector operators, attract investors and increase trade. Taking into account countries' political economy dynamics, we should agree on priority areas where well-designed, measurable, and implementable reforms should be enacted. These priorities should be agreed in the Partnership Priorities or equivalent policy documents. The EU in cooperation with Member States will provide support based on

¹⁷ Containment measures limiting transportation and economic activity have had wide reverberations and widened inequalities, especially for the young and the most vulnerable, with unemployment on the rise, and growth, trade flows, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and remittances going down. The cost of the pandemic on public finances has undermined fiscal consolidation efforts and put stress on social protection systems.

Southern Neighbourhood accounts for close to 25% of the present EU budget support portfolio globally.

¹⁹ Commonly defined as the budgetary room that allows a government to provide resources for public purposes without undermining fiscal sustainability.

²⁰ According to the World Bank 2019 Doing Business report, the regional average in the Middle East and North Africa region is 58.30 out of 100 (Rank 112).

partners' commitment to the coherent and effective implementation of economic and governance reforms in these areas.

Initiatives to **foster socio-economic sustainability at the local level could also contribute to strengthening national systems.** Our enhanced policy dialogue²¹ should also encourage the deepening of public-private dialogues.

Sustainable economies

Economic diversification is important, especially for countries that rely heavily on sectors prone to economic shocks. The EU and its partners will work together to benefit from the growth in the green and digital economies, in line with the objectives set by the UfM sectoral dialogues. The blue economy's potential²² should also be integrated coherently in economic development planning, alongside the social economy. Thanks to its business models that put people and the planet at their core, the social economy holds potential to address many societal challenges and increases our society's resilience in times of crises.

Furthermore, the **focus on open strategic autonomy and the restructuring of global value chains in the wake of the pandemic** has the potential to create new opportunities for further integrating industrial supply chains between the EU and its Southern Neighbours. The ecosystems approach²³, developed in the Commission's Industrial Strategy²⁴, could also contribute to diversification efforts and to the development of win-win initiatives in the areas of market integration, regulatory convergence and financial inclusion. Industrial clusters within the Southern Neighbourhood could help economic development by connecting businesses to global and regional value chains, reducing the isolation of SMEs, promoting innovation, and generating more trade and investment.

Support to the private sector, especially SMEs, will also have a fundamental role to play²⁵. The EU and its partners should work together to support entrepreneurship and its ecosystems, including social and cooperative entrepreneurship, and start-ups from idea generation to maturity. The potential of diasporas should be used more actively in order to transfer competencies, knowhow and technologies and contribute to the creation of business links between the EU and Southern partners.

The funding gap for SMEs in the region constitutes a real brake on their development. On access-to-finance, which should also include refugees, we intend to work with IFIs to develop a comprehensive approach to financial inclusion, including micro-finance, and social

²¹ Policy dialogue on the reforms supported through Sector Reform Performance Contracts will allow mitigating risks inherent to EU financial support and seek synergies with complementary instruments such as blending and investments.

²² The efforts would take stock of the UfM Ministerial declaration on Sustainable Blue Economy (2 February 2021) and of the work implemented in the framework of the EU Initiative for the sustainable development of the blue economy in the Western Mediterranean region (WESTMed Initiative) <https://ufmsecreariat.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Declaration-UfM-Blue-Economy-EN-1.pdf>

²³ These ecosystems encompass all players operating in a value chain: from the smallest start-ups to the largest companies, from academia to research, service providers to suppliers.

²⁴ 'A New Industrial Strategy for Europe' (COM(2020) 102).

²⁵ SMEs in the region contribute to over 2/3 of total formal employment.

enterprise finance, and on the use of new financial instruments, including venture capital, business angels and impact finance.

Research and innovation has unparalleled benefits for the achievement of any forward-looking policy objective. Enhanced research and innovation, including association to the Framework Programme Horizon Europe²⁶, leads to more resilient and inclusive growth, as well as the creation of sustainable employment opportunities. Successful cooperation on the human dimension of connectivity, including innovation and science will be stepped up with a view to creating a knowledge society and economy.

Connected economies

The Mediterranean region has the human capital to take advantage of the digital transformation and become a competitor in the global digital economy.

In order to support digital transformation efforts we propose to structure our work together around four pillars: (i) governance, policy and regulatory frameworks; (ii) developing infrastructure and supporting universal access to enhanced, affordable and secure networks; (iii) digital literacy, skills, and entrepreneurship; and iv) digital services. The objective is to boost innovative digital transformation through encouraging the deployment of platforms and policies including e-government, eHealth, e-commerce, digital access to culture and cultural heritage, and digital skills in education, while ensuring a user-centric and the ethical use of technologies in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. We also propose to create better digital connections across the Mediterranean and contribute to economic integration.

Trade and investment are essential to unlock the region's potential. To increase competitiveness, we propose to prioritise the reduction of non-tariff barriers and the reduction of trading costs. Focus should be placed on the full implementation and compliance with existing multilateral, regional and bilateral agreements, in order to support trade, build investors' trust and avoid the resurgence of protectionism and trade restrictions. Building on the existing network of Association Agreements and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) negotiations underway with Morocco and Tunisia, we also propose to launch dialogues to identify partners' interest in modernising their trade and investment relations with the EU, in areas including investment facilitation, sustainable development, services, and when relevant agriculture to better adapt them to today's challenges.

Taking advantage of **opportunities at the sub-regional, regional and continental levels** can also contribute to economic diversification and deepen integration. The endorsement by all the Southern Mediterranean countries of the review of the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean Convention on Rules of Origin should be promoted. Synergies with Sub-Saharan Africa will be explored actively, especially in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the creation of a Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM), with a view to facilitating the emergence of targeted continental value chains and supporting sustainable investment.

²⁶ Horizon Europe will continue to support international collaboration between researchers and businesses in the EU and the rest of the world, including in the framework of science diplomacy.

Transport is a key component of policies and instruments supporting the development of the Southern Mediterranean, as highlighted by the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy²⁷. We should seize the opportunity to **link transport infrastructure through interoperability of rules and standards**. Priority will be given to the swift development of the Trans-Mediterranean Transport Network and to the transport policy reforms objectives identified jointly under the Regional Transport Action Plan (RTAP) and supported by the ongoing technical cooperation. Logistics, covering both regional infrastructure and links with customs cooperation, will feature in our aid-for-trade initiatives. Space cooperation will continue to play a supportive role, notably through joint actions for the uptake of Galileo free and open services and through the extension of the European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS).

Inclusive economies

Under the new Agenda for the Mediterranean we propose to work together to support systems and recovery strategies in line with the objectives set by the UfM sectoral Dialogue on Employment and Labour²⁸ that (i) foster equality of opportunities and outcomes, and (ii) prioritise social dialogue, social protection and inclusion in order to address social and territorial inequalities.

Enormous positive returns could be brought by creating prospects for young people in their country by preventing brain drain and creating decent employment for all²⁹, and by increasing women's labour market participation and their economic empowerment. This should be placed at the centre of the design and implementation of socio-economic reforms and investment initiatives. Moreover, we should focus on the impact of the informal economy³⁰ on people's welfare and partners' public finances and support skills policies for all, also in view of supporting formalisation.

Action points: Support to inclusive, resilient, sustainable, and connected economies

- Co-financing sustainable investments funded by partners' sovereign recovery funds in the context of the EFSD+
- Developing and supporting joint reform matrices focusing on the investment climate and the business environment
- Supporting initiatives to assist partners in attracting and retaining value chain diversification opportunities in selected sectors, aligned with good governance

²⁷ 'Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy' (COM(2020) 789).

²⁸ Ministerial Declaration of the UfM Employment and Labour Ministers, Cascais, April 2019.

²⁹ According to ILO estimates, 17 million full-time jobs were lost in the second quarter of 2020, compared to the final quarter of 2019.

³⁰ The ILO Recommendation n°204 concerning the transition from the informal to the formal economy describes the "informal economy" as referring to all economic activities by workers and economic units that are – in law or in practice – not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements.

principles

- Encouraging partners to join the Addis Tax Initiative³¹
- Stepping up support to the green, blue and social economies through innovative financial vehicles, (including impact finance) and the development of adequate regulatory ecosystems.
- Supporting the implementation of SME policies with the guiding reference of the Small Business Act principles and of the Communication ‘An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe’ of March 2020³²
- Supporting a well-functioning social dialogue, at all pertinent levels.
- Providing technical support to promote financial inclusion, especially on digital payments and digital literacy for SMEs, especially in rural areas
- Participation in the EU Framework Programme HorizonEurope
- Mainstreaming support for the social economy in regional and bilateral programmes, including support for developing adequate legal and policy frameworks, strengthening institutional capacity and enabling mutual learning
- Working to support regulatory convergence in the field of telecommunications, as well electronic identification and trust services, and frameworks for the protection of personal and free flow of non-personal data Modernising the trade and investment relations with partners interested in closer integration with the EU, especially in areas such as investment facilitation, services, sustainable development, and agriculture
- Supporting the region’s integration into the AfCFTA in order to stimulate the creation of targeted continental value chains
- Co-financing investments to enhance the availability of ubiquitous and high bandwidth telecommunication infrastructure. Ensuring the take-up of the EU 5G toolbox principles³³ to ensure network security.
- Stepping up efforts to adopt the indicative maps of the future trans-Mediterranean transport network (TMN-T) that will constitute the external dimension of the trans-European transport network (TEN-T), while already prioritizing projects on this network , and contributing to linking up Sub-Sahara Africa, North Africa and Europe
- Supporting regulatory convergence in all transport areas in coherence with the 2021-2027 regional transport action plan through Euro-Mediterranean transport projects
- Assisting the development of sustainable tourism

³¹ The Addis Tax Initiative (ATI) is a multi-stakeholder partnership that aims to enhance domestic revenue mobilisation (DRM) in partner countries.

³² ‘An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe’ (COM(2020) 103).

³³ ‘Secure 5G deployment in the EU - Implementing the EU toolbox’ (COM (2020) 50) The Communication on the EU 5G toolbox commits the EU to implementing the principles of the toolbox, designed to ensure the secure rollout of broadband infrastructure, not only in the EU but also in all external projects using EU funding, including via IFIs such as the EIB.

3. Peace and security

The protracted conflicts in the Mediterranean region constitute a key obstacle to political stability and sustainable development. Joint efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts, promote security cooperation, mitigate the consequences of conflicts and address their root causes are paramount priorities in order to protect people and allow them to thrive.

For its part, the EU is already the main provider of humanitarian and development assistance. It is able to deploy a wide range of instruments in a triple nexus humanitarian-development-peace approach. It is also a **security provider** by deploying Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations, mediation and stabilisation actions, as well as restrictive measures. The EU has built credibility with a consistent position on the importance of respect for international law. As a trusted partner, the EU is uniquely placed to bring together conflicting parties, international and regional partners as well as relevant stakeholders, such as humanitarian development and peacebuilding actors into dialogue on strategic issues, reduce tensions and contribute to efforts to solve conflicts. Many Southern partners are calling for increased EU engagement and joint efforts to resolve enduring conflicts and address their impact. Experience shows that such a convening and diplomatic role can only be effective when the EU is united and able to act and speak in unison, at the bilateral and multilateral levels. The engagement of EU Member States, including at the highest level, is therefore key, as is an upgraded and intensified political dialogue across the Mediterranean to build trust, reduce tensions and help solve conflicts.

On this basis, the EU and its Member States and partners should renew efforts to reach a settlement in the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). In this regard, the EU will seek to encourage and build upon the recent establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and a number of Arab countries, with a view to enhancing the prospects for a negotiated two-state solution based on the internationally agreed parameters as well as regional peace and security. The EU, as convenor of the Syria conferences, and southern partners should step up efforts to resolve the devastating and now decade-long conflict in Syria in support of UN-led efforts. They should also continue to support Lebanon's own efforts to resolve its domestic economic, social and political crisis. The EU and its partners should cooperate more closely in addressing peace, stability and development challenges in the Sahel region. The EU and its southern neighbours should also intensify their support for efforts to reach a solution to the issue of the Western Sahara within the UN-led process. Finding a sustainable and inclusive political solution to the long-lasting crisis in Libya is also a priority. The EU will continue to be actively engaged within the framework of and in support of the UN-led Berlin process, including at operational level through Operation IRINI and other contributions. It will explore possible additional support to the implementation of the ceasefire, and support the country's constitutional and electoral process and long-term stabilisation. In seeking solutions to the crises in the region, the EU will continue to support United Nations (UN) efforts and engage with regional actors and organisations, notably the League of Arab States (LAS), the

African Union (AU), and relevant sub-regional groupings³⁴. In the Eastern Mediterranean, the EU will support peaceful dialogue based on international law, including through a multilateral conference that could address issues on which multilateral solutions are needed. The EU and Southern Neighborhood partners should engage constructively to safeguard the stability and security of the wider region too.

The multilateral system is facing significant challenges at a time when most issues require multilateral solutions. **The EU and its Southern partners share a common interest in supporting a revitalised rules based multilateral system with the UN at its core.** We should work together and strengthen cooperation in multilateral fora, notably on peace and security, on global issues and on strengthening rules-based trade, the rule of law, human rights, child protection and good governance, as well as on the UN “women, peace, and security” (WPS) and the “youth, peace, and security” (YPS) agendas.

Major security threats such as **terrorism, hybrid threats as well as cybercrime and organised crime**, including the trade of illegal firearms, drug trafficking and money laundering are key challenges; they can only be addressed through joint efforts.

Terrorism and its **financing, radicalisation, violent extremism**, and the phenomenon of **Foreign Terrorist Fighters** occur on and affect both shores of the Mediterranean and are often interlinked. Recent attacks have underscored the need to deepen our high level strategic dialogues on counterterrorism. Building on existing cooperation, notably on law enforcement, we need to step up our efforts to prevent radicalisation, including deepening interreligious and intercultural dialogues, and building capacity to address violent extremism, online recruitment, preventing of dissemination of terrorist content online and fighting against illegal trafficking of cultural heritage. International cooperation remains essential and the EU stands ready to increase its technical assistance, including on deficiencies in Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT), and via its network of experts deployed in key Delegations in the region.

While digitalisation offers significant opportunities it also opens the door to new threats, including increased vulnerability of critical infrastructure (e.g. energy, transport, banking and health). We need to work together to build cyber resilience, including against disinformation and influence operations, share best practices, train cyber security experts and explore possibilities offered by innovative tools for law enforcement purposes, in full respect of human rights and civil liberties. We need to work together to enhance cooperation against cyber threats and make full use of existing international frameworks, such as the Council of Europe Budapest Convention, to that end.

In line with the 2021 Council Conclusions on climate and energy diplomacy, the EU will strengthen and mainstream work on the **climate, security and defence nexus**, including

³⁴ In doing so, the EU can build on the EU-UN partnership in crisis management issues, its dialogue and cooperation with the LAS, the UN-EU-AU partnership, and cooperate according to the EU-AU Memorandum of Understanding on Peace, Security and Governance.

through increased action on climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction, as well as collaboration with the UN and regional organisations.

We also propose to use the tools identified in the **EU Security Union Strategy**³⁵ to strengthen the capacity of, and cooperation between, law enforcement, judicial and civil authorities. In addition, cooperation on chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) risk mitigation as well as on civil protection and disaster risk management should be further enhanced.

Cooperation on law enforcement and judicial cooperation should be strengthened between the EU and partner countries, also with the assistance of relevant EU Agencies (Europol, Cepol, Frontex, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, Eurojust), including by negotiating cooperation agreements between the EU and Southern Neighbourhood countries. To this end, the EU shall engage with Southern partners in order to ensure that their law enforcement and judicial systems meet high standards of data protection and respect human rights.

Improved judicial cooperation on civil matters is needed to improve contract enforcement and address cross-border child abductions, child protection and maintenance obligations. Accession to, and correct implementation of, the Hague Conventions on Private International Law³⁶ should be a priority in the region.

The EU proposes to develop further its partnership on security matters with its neighbouring countries, as well as enhancing operational cooperation, including for maritime security and coastguard cooperation. Such partnerships should be tailor-made, correspond to respective needs and enjoy high-level political support in order to guarantee concrete results. Cooperation with regional and international organisations is also vital, including with NATO in the framework of the Warsaw and Brussels Joint Declarations.³⁷

Action points: Cooperation on peace, conflict resolution and prevention

- Upgrading and intensifying the political dialogue between the EU and its Member States and Southern Partners and engaging the EU's strategic partners in order to enhance joint efforts to solve conflicts and reduce tensions in the region, using all tools in an integrated manner for regional stability and security.
- Investing in prevention on the fight against radicalisation, conflict resolution and stabilisation through an integrated approach to conflict and crises, acting at all stages of the conflict cycle
- Securing resilience by better linking humanitarian, development, peace and security efforts
- Where mutually beneficial, participation in CSDP missions and operations using instruments such as Framework Participation Agreements

³⁵ 'EU Security Union Strategy' (COM(2020) 605).

³⁶ <https://www.hcch.net/en/home/>

³⁷ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133163.htm
https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156626.htm

- Strengthening the role of women and young people in peacebuilding in line with the EU's political commitment for the implementation of the Women Peace and Security agenda at regional and international levels

Action points: Security cooperation

- Stepping up counter terrorism and security dialogues, including cooperation on AML/CFT and encouraging the ratification and implementation of the relevant international conventions
- Strengthening cooperation on counter-terrorism, prevention and fight against radicalisation, fight against organised crime, illicit firearms and drugs.
- Swift implementation of “CT Inflow”, Euromed police, the “EU4 Monitoring Drugs”, the EuroMed Justice and the CyberSouth programmes
- Further developing the EU CBRN Risk Mitigation centres of excellence, which proved to be an important asset in dealing with COVID-19 pandemic as well as other actions to address security threats
- Enhancing work on climate resilience and adaptation, investing in preventive measures and reinforcing cooperation on civil protection and disaster risk management building on programmes such as PPRD South³⁸.
- Engaging with partner countries to strengthen judicial and police cooperation with the EU, including through the negotiation of cooperation agreements with Europol and Eurojust.
- Improving judicial cooperation in civil matters by fostering accession to and correct implementation of the relevant Conventions developed by The Hague Conference on Private International Law.

4. Migration and mobility

Migration is a global phenomenon that requires joint responses, solidarity and global responsibility sharing. No country can effectively manage migration, including addressing the challenges of irregular migration, on its own. The EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum aims at a step-change in our engagement with our international partners. It is centred around comprehensive, tailor-made, balanced and mutually beneficial partnerships. The ultimate aim is to ensure that migration only takes place in a safe and regular manner, preventing dangerous journeys and avoiding loss of life, by fighting smuggling and strengthening cooperation on migration governance, while providing international protection to those who need it. Countries should be enabled to offer a stable and predictable social and economic future providing genuine opportunities, especially to their youth. The EU will actively work to address the root causes of irregular migration and forced displacement, through conflict resolution and by addressing the socio-economic challenges exacerbated by COVID-19.

³⁸ PPRD Sud III – ‘Prévention, Préparation et Réponse aux catastrophes naturelles et d’origine humaine dans les pays partenaires du Moyen-Orient et d’Afrique du Nord’.

The New Pact on Migration and Asylum provides a strengthened basis to achieve a sustainable and long-term response in terms of migration and asylum management.

Our enhanced partnerships on migration encompass all the different aspects of migration and asylum, taking into account the EU and partner countries' interests. At the same time these will be embedded in the different strands of our cooperation – political, security and economic.

Every country faces specific situations, and its own opportunities. There is no “one size fits all”, tailor made solutions are needed. This is and will continue to be reflected in the EU's comprehensive partnerships with each country, in line with the New Pact of Migration and Asylum.

The EU will continue to **protect those in need and support host countries**, recognising that several southern Mediterranean countries host substantial numbers of refugees and migrants.

Irregular migration brings challenges for both the region and for the EU, also by further increasing the economic power and destabilising influence of criminal networks. The solution resides in addressing migrant smuggling jointly. In this vein, the EU and partner countries will significantly **step up common efforts to combat trafficking and fight the criminal networks behind migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings**³⁹. Strengthening **migration and asylum governance** including border management capacity is a key element. The EU is ready to support according to partners' needs.

Stepping up cooperation on return, readmission and sustainable reintegration and making returns more effective are important elements of these partnerships. To support these partnerships, the EU will mobilise relevant EU policies, tools and instruments as part of a comprehensive approach. Given the importance of voluntary returns, the Commission will adopt a Voluntary Return and Reintegration Strategy and will set out new approaches to the design, promotion, and implementation of assisted voluntary return and reintegration schemes.

The EU is also committed to support legal migration and mobility with our partners, in line with its and Member States' competences. Resettlement is important to provide protection to the most vulnerable refugees. Talent Partnerships to promote legal migration and mobility with relevant Southern Neighbourhood partners will be integral parts of our cooperation, mindful of the risks of brain drain.

Cooperation at the regional and multilateral level should be explored further, including through triangular and south-south cooperation, since some southern Mediterranean partners are origin, transit and destination countries. At the regional level, cooperation under the Joint Valletta Action Plan⁴⁰, and the Khartoum⁴¹ and Rabat⁴² Processes will be advanced,

³⁹ At the Conference on Anti-Smuggling of 13 July 2020 hosted by Italy and with the participation of EU and key African partners, partners committed to fight smuggling jointly.

⁴⁰ <https://www.jvapfollowup.org/jvap/>

including a “whole of route” approach. In this context, trilateral cooperation with the UN as well as with regional actors should be strengthened, including by building on the successful experience of the trilateral AU-EU-UN Task Force in Libya.

The Commission and the High Representative propose to use all the tools at EU disposal, including EU Agencies, the NDICI⁴³ and relevant internal instruments to bring operational and financial support in the area of migration and mobility.

Action points: Enhance cooperation on migration and mobility on the basis of a tailor made comprehensive, balanced and mutually beneficial partnerships

- Supporting partners’ capacity for effective migration and asylum governance, including border management, all aspects of asylum and migration systems and readmission capabilities.
- Targeted assistance to create socio-economic opportunities for migrants, forcibly displaced persons and host communities, including in the context of the COVID-19 recovery, with particular attention to marginalised regions.
- Stepping-up cooperation on effective return and readmission; Supporting assisted voluntary return and sustainable reintegration from the EU but also between individual partner countries.
- Developing legal pathways to Europe via continued efforts on resettlements and in labour mobility schemes, in particular the swift launch of Talent Partnerships, while fully respecting EU and Member States’ competences.
- Exploring triangular and South-South cooperation frameworks and enhancing cooperation with regional and international actors.

5. Green transition: climate change resilience, energy and environment

The Southern Neighbourhood is one of the main hotspots in the world as regards climate change and environmental degradation. At the same time, the Mediterranean region is home to some of the world’s best solar and wind resources, presenting unparalleled opportunities for clean energy cooperation, with hydrogen production as a new strategic priority. The full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and internationally agreed biodiversity goals will be crucial to help better equip the region for future systemic shocks. The European Green Deal represents a unique opportunity for cooperation on strategic priorities. Comprehensively strengthening environment, energy, and climate change resilience can help mitigate risks to human lives and livelihoods and promote sustainable development, job creation and transition to high value sectors.

Green growth and climate action

⁴¹ <https://www.khartoumprocess.net/>

⁴² <https://www.rabat-process.org/fr/>

⁴³ The NDICI includes a 10% target for migration-related actions.

The EU and its partners will work together in order **to increase their climate ambition, and to streamline targets, shifting towards green growth and developing or strengthening coherent, achievable, and measurable climate action measures** in line with partners' national determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement, National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and the external dimension of the European Green Deal. Focus will be placed on (i) climate and environmental governance, its link with public finances and fiscal initiatives, and on the monitoring of targets; (ii) supporting carbon pricing initiatives; (iii) administrative capacity and targeted technical assistance to implement and enforce legislation both at the central and local levels; and (iv) education and awareness raising within both the private sector and the population at large as agents of change. The Copernicus Earth Observation Programme services and data support green growth policies and climate monitoring. The cooperation could also promote the implementation of sustainable urban mobility plans in the region's cities, developing green multimodal transport solutions. This effort will require coordinated and enhanced policy dialogue⁴⁴ with all involved stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society, including at the local level. Increasing climate change adaptation capacities and disaster risk reduction is a priority in the region. Focus will be placed on (i) supporting climate change resilience, (ii) climate-proofing investments, (iii) investing in preventive measures, (iv) nature-based solutions and risk management capacities.

A **strategic engagement with IFIs** and the private sector will support the development of a financial system that supports sustainable growth. In addition, the participation of public authorities responsible for developing sustainable finance policies in partner countries notably through international fora such as the International Platform on Sustainable Finance (IPSF)⁴⁵ will be encouraged. The EU and the other IPSF members share best practices and coordinate efforts on environmentally sustainable investment, such as green taxonomies, environmental and climate disclosures, and standards and labels for **green financial products** (including green bonds).

Energy transition and energy security

Europe and the Mediterranean region have interdependent, complementary and converging energy interests based on the priorities of the green and fair transition and energy security.

Future cooperation will have **to be adapted to partners' diverse endowment and needs** and be focused on selected priority objectives: (i) massive deployment of renewable energy and clean hydrogen production, contributing to the aspiration to have at least 40 Gigawatts of electrolyser capacity in the EU Neighbourhood by 2030 ; (ii) a stronger interconnection of electricity systems⁴⁶; (iii) energy efficiency efforts and measures, with a focus on buildings and appliances ; (iv) policies to address fugitive methane emissions from fossil fuel production, transport and use, in line with the framework set in the EU methane strategy.

⁴⁴ For example, the UfM Regional Platform in Research and Innovation that identified climate change and renewable energies as main priorities for cooperation in the coming years.

⁴⁵ [International platform on sustainable finance.](#)

⁴⁶ [The Mediterranean Master Plan 2020 of Electricity Interconnections](#) identifies 15 potential interconnection projects and assesses their costs and benefits.

Resource efficiency, fight against pollution and biodiversity

Considering urbanisation trends, the loss of biodiversity, including deforestation and land degradation, habitat loss and fragmentation, increasing marine and land pollution, and the impact of climate change on resources, especially access to water, we propose to focus on **measures to protect and restore biodiversity**, both marine and terrestrial, animal and vegetal, as well as on **sustainable water management**, including wastewater treatment, water re-use and efficient use of water management.

Levels of air pollution are a widespread issue across the region, in particular in densely urbanized coastal areas, with concentrations of air emissions from industry and transport, and their deposition into the sea. This has significant impacts on health, the environment and sea related economic activities, including fisheries and tourism.

Support measures will include awareness raising and education activities to prevent unregulated waste disposal, promote sustainable consumption and production, the development of modern facilities that would ensure recycling and safe waste disposal, and reform of the legislative, fiscal and institutional frameworks to reduce the different types of pollution, and sustainable land use planning and management. The EU will continue to work with countries in the region, in the context of the Barcelona Convention, to take action to reduce emission levels from maritime transport in particular, with the view to declare the Mediterranean Sea as an Emission Control Area.

Sustainable food systems

Cooperation will be strengthened in order to transition to **sustainable food systems**, including sustainable management of agriculture, fisheries, and preservation of natural production factors to strengthen food security. This may include providing technical expertise in formulating agricultural and blue economy related policies, supporting agro-ecological practices, and promoting smart agriculture and aquaculture concepts. Support to regional integration of markets under the AfCFTA and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean (GFCM) framework⁴⁷ on fishery and aquaculture should be enhanced, including the development of foods value chains at the continental level.

Action points: Green transition : climate resilience, environment, and energy

- Joint efforts to streamline targets, shifting towards green growth and developing or strengthening coherent, achievable, and measurable climate action measures identified under the NDCs and NAPs at both regional and bilateral levels
- Reinforcing strategic engagement to support the development of a financial system that supports sustainable growth and climate resilience investments, by way of a regional initiative on sustainable finance in collaboration with IFIs
- Reinforcing bilateral engagement and providing targeted assistance to support large-

⁴⁷ <http://www.fao.org/gfcm/about/en/>

scale investments in renewables and clean hydrogen production for both domestic consumption and export. Supporting, in line with the objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy⁴⁸ the design, investment in, and implementation of sustainable food systems, from production to consumption, paying particular attention to food safety, plant and animal health and welfare, as well as with a view to ensure regional food security

- Promoting initiatives on waste management, including food waste and marine litter
- Supporting biodiversity protection and restoration, including creations of effective and well-managed networks of coastal and marine protected areas
- Supporting efforts to reduce emissions, in particular to marine and coastal environment, water and air.
- Promoting the sustainable use of natural resources as a basis for achieving the transition to a circular economy

Implementation

The EU will **use all its instruments to ensure the efficient, effective, swift and tailor-made rollout** of the new Agenda for the Mediterranean. It will **take into account the region's diversity, interests, and needs. Policy dialogue with all relevant stakeholders** will remain the cornerstone of the cooperation. Special attention will be placed on the local level to ensure that the impact of cooperation is distributed geographically in an adequate manner.

Continuous and forward-looking dialogue between the EU and its partners will **ensure mutually beneficial partnership and co-ownership**, taking into account the social dynamics and impact of challenges and reforms. We will strive for tailor-made, integrated multi-sectoral cooperation, trade and investment packages and platforms that constitute a credible response to the needs of partners and of the EU. The **level of EU financial support will be proportionate to each partners' ambitions and commitment** to shared values, the agenda of reforms, including on governance, and their implementation.

A significantly strengthened political dialogue **will contribute to building a shared understanding with Southern Neighbourhood partners**. In this regard, we propose regular meetings at the level of foreign and sectoral ministers as well as senior officials, whereas meetings of Heads of State and Government could be convened when necessary. Strengthened coordination will translate into a better alignment of positions at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

Efforts will continue to enhance regional, sub-regional and inter-regional cooperation. The role of the Union for the Mediterranean remains indispensable. In addition, sub-regional cooperation adapted to the specificities of the different sub-regions of the Mediterranean and beyond. Moreover, effective approaches will require broader co-operation with neighbouring

⁴⁸ 'A Farm to Fork Strategy' (COM(2020) 381).

countries and regions. The inter-regional dimension is therefore important. We need to increase cooperation between North and Sub-Saharan Africa, also as triangular cooperation with the EU. There is also a need to strengthen coherence between what the EU does with Northern African partners and the rest of the African continent. Similarly, inter-regional cooperation with the Gulf and Red Sea regions is important. Increased cooperation with regional actors and organizations, notably the League of Arab States, the African Union and relevant sub regional groupings will be key. Pragmatic initiatives based on variable geometry should be explored to support those willing to advance further in the cooperation on common Mediterranean goods. We will scale up our **climate and energy diplomacy** efforts both at bilateral and regional level.

The NDICI and the EFSD+ will be the main instruments for EU cooperation with partner countries. All actions will follow the “policy first” principle. The EU will promote Joint Programming and Team Europe initiatives on the ground, building on the successful experience during the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU will encourage EU Member States, European development agencies and financing institutions, as well as other donors, to jointly develop together with partner countries coherent and complementary approaches for sectoral priorities. The future European Financial Architecture for Development will also contribute to maximise EU efforts.

The new Agenda for the Mediterranean will inform the preparation of bilateral political frameworks jointly agreed with the partners⁴⁹ and the multi-annual programming under the NDICI for the period 2021-2027, building on consultations with partner countries and other relevant stakeholders. Lessons learnt from previous programmes under the Neighbourhood policy will help target future actions. EU Delegations will be instrumental in facilitating this process.

The European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) under the NDICI, and its innovative financial architecture will allow **crowding in private sector investment**, in cooperation with the European Investment Bank (EIB), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Member State development banks, and international financial institutions.

Moreover, further integration and exchange between the two shores of the Mediterranean will be achieved by further encouraging and facilitating partners’ participation in EU programmes in the period 2021-2027.

The EU will also strengthen its strategic communications to raise awareness of the actions taken under the new Agenda for the Mediterranean. The Commission and the High Representative will work together with our partners to bring about more robust and enabling frameworks for freedom of expression, and support healthy information environments. Implementing measures to counter disinformation and misinformation will remain a key

⁴⁹ Joint Documents, Partnership priorities or equivalent are documents establishing jointly agreed political and economic reform agendas and related implementing tools. Joint Documents will continue to frame external assistance under the 2021-2027 EU Multiannual Financial Framework.

aspect of this approach⁵⁰. The EU and partners should also ensure adequate visibility of our political engagement and cooperation actions on the ground, including through outreach and public diplomacy initiatives.

Finally, this Agenda for the Mediterranean will guide our policy towards the region and the EU will assess progress regularly.

⁵⁰ Building on the joint action plan against disinformation (5 December 2018), the European democracy action plan (COM/2020/790) and the experience from the COVID-19 pandemic, EU strategic communications efforts will be rooted in European values and principles.